

HALLOWEEN HORROR SPECIAL

Rod Serling's
THE TWILIGHT ZONE Magazine

**DEAN R.
KOONTZ**

**STEPHEN
KING**
INTERVIEW

**TV PREVIEW
TWILIGHT
ZONE'S
SECOND
SEASON**

**FEARS &
FANTASIES**
CHARLES SHEFFIELD
JOHN SKIPP
CRAIG SPECTOR
DAVID J. SCHOW

**"TRICK OR
TREAT"
FILM
PREVIEW**

APR 1987
82007RCE111KN00R
ALBERT RICE 15G1
1113 KING CT
CHEYENNE
WY 82007



CONTENTS

December 1986

FICTION

The Black Pumpkin	Dean R. Koontz	26
<i>The face of the jack-o'-lantern was carved with evil.</i>		
A Perfect Halloween Night	Rose Rinaldi	30
<i>... but not for everyone.</i>		
The Spirit of Things	John Skipp	31
<i>After endless centuries, they'd returned to claim their season.</i>		
Red Light	David J. Schow	36
<i>Each photograph stole a bit more of her soul.</i>		
Fractures	Kim Anieau	40
<i>Only one of her selves was the woman he loved.</i>		
The Cryptogram	Donald R. Burleson	44
<i>The cypher was a pathway to another world.</i>		
Hotel Hunting	Charles Sheffield	62
<i>Something dark and deadly waited at the old hotel.</i>		
The Hole Truth	Lois McMaster Bujold	68
<i>A deep and growing problem had just opened before them.</i>		

FEATURES

Dean of Suspense	Joe R. Lansdale	22
<i>A candid conversation with author Dean R. Koontz.</i>		
Probing by Fire	Craig Spector	34
<i>A talk with David J. Schow about "hardcore horror."</i>		
Interview: Stephen King	Tyson Blue	48
<i>America's "Ghostmaster General" reveals the truth about IT.</i>		
Film Preview: Trick or Treat	James Verniere	50
<i>An exclusive look at a scary new rock 'n' roll horror movie.</i>		
TZ/TV: Fall TV Preview	Robin Bromley	52
<i>Special color section on The Twilight Zone's second season.</i>		
Next Stop: The Twilight Zone	Michael Reaves	55
<i>An insider's adventures selling a script to the show.</i>		
TZ Teleplay: Her Pilgrim Soul	Alan Brennert	57
<i>The first script published from the new Twilight Zone series.</i>		

OTHER DIMENSIONS

In the Twilight Zone	6
Illuminations	17
The Other Side	100
Books	8
Book Notes	12
Screen	96

"Season of the Witch" cover art by J. K. Potter.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY FRANCES JETTER, CARL WESLEY, J. K. POTTER, WARREN GEBERT, TREVOR IRVIN, AND JOHN BRIAKEY.

Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone Magazine* (ISSN # 0279-6090) December 1986, Volume 5, Number 5, is published bimonthly (February, April, June, August, October, December) in the United States and simultaneously in Canada by TZ Publications, a division of Montclair Publishing Corporation, 800 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. Telephone: (212) 986-9600. Copyright © 1986 by TZ Publications. Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone Magazine* is published pursuant to a license from Carol Serling and Viacom Enterprises, a division of Viacom International, Inc. All rights reserved. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Return postage must accompany all unsolicited material. The publisher assumes no responsibility for loss and return of unsolicited materials. All rights reserved on material accepted for publication unless otherwise specified. All letters sent to Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone Magazine* or to its editors are assumed intended for publication. Nothing may be reproduced in whole or in part without written permission from the publisher. Any similarity between persons appearing in fiction and real persons living or dead is coincidental. Single copies \$2.50 in U.S., U.S. military bases, and U.S. possessions; \$3.00 elsewhere (excepting the December issue, which is \$2.95 in the U.S. and \$3.00 elsewhere). Subscriptions: U.S., U.S. military, and U.S. possessions, \$15.50; \$18.50 elsewhere. All orders must be paid in U.S. currency. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Postmaster: Send address changes to Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone Magazine*, P.O. Box 252, Mt. Morris, IL 61054-0252. Printed in U.S.A.

IN THE TWILIGHT ZONE

Turning Points

The first frost runs a chill finger down your spine. The full moon rises as bonfires blaze. Strange apparitions are abroad. It's Halloween, the season that Nathaniel Hawthorne called "the carnival time of disembodied spirits."

Halloween marks a turning point in the year—an end to summer, a time to surrender to the coming of winter. This Halloween issue also marks a turning point for *The Twilight Zone*—a new editor, a new design, and some unusual new features as well.

The issue turns on three themes—Halloween, horror, and the "intermedia meltdown" that seems to be taking place between print, music, film, and video—illustrated by three "generations" of horror writers (although, chronologically, they're all within a decade or so of each other.)

To begin with, roving correspondent Tyson Blue catches up with our Grand Master, Stephen King, at something of a turning point in his career, and talks with him about his new bestseller *IT*.

The next generation is represented by Dean R. Koontz, whose bestselling novel *Strangers* has just emerged from Putnam. In a candid interview with Joe Lansdale, who profiled Robert McCammon in our last issue, Koontz voices strong feelings about his own childhood, and the effects of screen and print violence, reserving his strongest words for the critics.

Koontz's macabre story "The Black Pumpkin" leads off a trio of Halloween horror tales. The others are "A Perfect Halloween Night" by Rose Rinaldi, and "The Spirit of Things" by John Skipp. The former story marks

Rinaldi's first appearance in an adult fiction magazine, although she's previously been seen in a number of publications for young readers. The latter tale first appeared in the excellent Canadian little magazine *Borderlands*. We thought it deserved a wider audience.

Skipp, and two other contributors to this issue, Craig Spector and David J. Schow, exemplify a third generation of "hardcore horror" writers who are currently pushing the limits of the genre. Schow contributes one of his most powerful stories ever, "Red Light," a haunting tale of love and loss. And, in a freewheeling transcontinental discussion, Spector and Schow examine how the darker forms of fantasy fit into the intermedia mix.

Skipp and Spector are co-authors of *The Light at the End*, an urban horror novel published to much acclaim and success this past spring by Bantam Books. They're also working rock musicians involved in several projects based on their written works. Their second novel, *The Cleanup*, is due out from Bantam next spring, and they are just laying down tracks on *The Scream*, which Craig describes as "our very own apocalyptic battle-of-the-bands novel."

Skipp and his lady Marianne have recently left the urban jungle and settled in the wilds of rural Pennsylvania with their newborn daughter Melanie.

Longtime *Twilight Zone* readers have already met Dave Schow in a variety of guises. His story "Pulpmeister," published in the December, 1982, *TZ*, introduced readers to the hack writer Oliver Lowenbruck. Like Von-



John Skipp



Kim Antieau

negut's Kilgore Trout, Lowenbruck went on to write two stories of his own: "Coming Soon to a Theater Near You" (April '84) and "Lonesome Coyote Blues" (February, '85). It now can be revealed that both writers are one and the same. It was also Schow who, with the help of Jeffrey Frentzen, wrote *TZ*'s popular episode guide to *The Outer Limits*. Their book *The Outer Limits: The Official Companion* has just been published by Berkley. He has also written a rock horror novel, *The Kill Riff*, due out from Tor early next year.

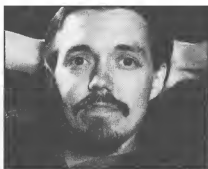
To tie it all up nicely, film columnist James Verniere provides an exclusive color preview of *Trick or Treat*, a scary new entry in the Halloween horror sweepstakes about a rock star who returns from the dead. HMMMMMM.

The crossover between print and screen is also evident in our special color section on the fall television season—including the return of the new *Twilight Zone* television series. Michael Reaves, last seen in these pages with "The Night People" (October '85), describes the painful process of selling a story to the new series. (His script, "Night song," not surprisingly, is also a rock fantasy.)

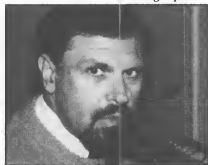
Reaves may be the intermedia meltdown personified. He is not only the author or co-author of at least ten novels, including *Dragonworld* and *Helstar*, and a dozen short stories, but over two hundred teleplays as well. He currently lives in a breath-taking cliffside home in Woodland Hills, California, "with my wife, Brynne Stephens who also writes, and



Craig Spector



David J. Schow



Charles Sheffield



Lois McMaster Bujold

my two-year-old daughter Mallory, who doesn't—yet."

As a special added treat, this issue contains another first: the first published script from the new *Twilight Zone* series. The script is "Her Pilgrim Soul," a poignant fantasy by Alan Brennert. Executive Story Consultant to *The Twilight Zone*, Brennert has written a number of the show's screenplays, including "A Message from Charity," and adaptations of Greg Bear's "Dead Run" and Harlan Ellison's "Shatterday." He is also the author of two novels, the most recent being *Kindred Spirits* (Tor Books).

But there's still more to our autumnal feast. We're pleased to welcome to these pages Charles Sheffield, an acknowledged master of "hard" science fiction whose story "Hotel Hunting" shows he's equally talented at tales of terror.

A charming and articulate Englishman who is a former president of both the American Astronautical Society and the Science Fiction Writers of America, Sheffield is an astrophysicist who is actively involved with the U.S. space program. He's also the author of half a dozen novels, most recently *The Nimrod Hunt*, from Baen Books.

Kim Antieau is also a newcomer to *The Twilight Zone*, although she's been winning notice with her stories in Asimov's *SF* and Charles Grant's *Shadows* anthologies. She's recently moved from Oregon to Tucson, Arizona, with her husband Mario Milosevic, whom she met at the Clarion Science Fiction Writers' Workshop. "Rod Serling had a profound influence on my writing," says

Antieau. "His work was filled with tenderness and hope. And during a time when TV was filled with misogyny, Serling's works treated women as human beings."

We're also happy to mark the return of Lois McMaster Bujold and Donald R. Burleson with two strange yarns of doorways into other worlds: "The Hole Truth" and "The Cryptogram." Burleson last appeared here with the blood-curdling tale entitled "Milk" (August '86). Bujold's first TZ story, "Barter", (April '85) will be adapted next year as a *Tales from the Darkside* episode. In the meantime, she's had two novels published by Baen Books, *Shards of Honor* and *The Warrior's Apprentice*, with a third, *Ethan of Athos*, due out next month.

Finally, this issue includes several new departments, among them an expanded *Illuminations* section, and a complementary feature called *The Other Side* which will provide glimpses into the strange, the unusual, and the bizarre.

There have been a few behind-the-scenes changes as well. In addition to a new editor, we also have a new Managing Editor, Peter Emshwiller. Peter (or "Stoney," as he's known here) is a second generation sf/fantasy person, the son of artist/filmmaker Ed Emshwiller and author Carol Emshwiller. And Tom Waters, who designed *The Twilight Zone's* elegant new format, assumes the post of Art Director with this issue. We hope you like TZ's current incarnation, and promise you lots more surprises up ahead.

—TWK

THE TWILIGHT ZONE Magazine

S. Edward Orenstein
President and Publisher
Brian D. Orenstein
Executive Vice President, Corporate
Russell T. Orenstein
Executive Vice President, Corporate

Associate Publisher and
Consulting Editor: Carol Serling

Editor in Chief: Tappan King
Associate Editor: Alan Rodgers
Managing Editor: Peter R. Emshwiller
Contributing Editors: Gahan Wilson,
James Verniere

Design Director: Michael Monte
Art Director: Tom Waters
Art Production: Cynthia M. Gurganus
Production Director: Stephen J. Fallon
Typography: Frank Federnock,
Lorraine Lambert

Controller: Chris Grossman
Accounting Manager:
Saul Steinhilber
Accounting Assistants: Asnar Angeles,
Anne Cannon, Rolando Gorospe
Office Manager: Margaret Inzana
Office Assistant: Barbara Markey
Traffic: Rick Jackson

Circulation Director:
Michael Dillon
Subscription Manager: Beverly Shimoff
Circulation Managers:

Bruce Antonangeli, *Midwestern*
Harold Bridge III, *Southern*
Sam Frode-Hansen, *Western*
Direct Sales Manager: Judy Linden
Circulation Coordinator: Nancy Wolz

Promotion Coordinator:
Laura Marriott
Publicist: Diana Farrell
Art Designer:
Gregory Lawrence Stewart

Advertising Director:
Harold Krause
Advertising Sales Manager:
Marina Paruolo
Advertising Sales Representative:
Fern Kershon
Midwest Representative:
Reynes & Associates, Inc.
460 Ash
Winnetka, Illinois 60093
(312) 930-9496
Advertising Assistant:
Theresa Martorano

BOOKS

by E. F. Bleiler

Tales of heroes and rogues, soldiers and goddesses.

Soldier of the Mist by Gene Wolfe
(Tor Books, \$15.95)

Dreams of Dark and Light by Tanith Lee
(Arkham House, \$21.95)

With *Soldier of the Mist*, Gene Wolfe enters a new world of history and fantasy, the ancient Aegean world at 479 B.C. This was the time of the Second Persian War, during which the Persians advanced into central Greece, destroying Athens along the way, but were stopped on land at the battle of Platea, near Thebas, and on sea, at Mycale. As the story begins, Xerxes's defeated army, routed and badly chewed up, is moving back through Greece to Thrace. One of the casualties of the war is a mysterious young man whom his friends call Latro (Latin for "servant," "mercenary soldier," or "bandit"). Latro was one of the hired soldiers fighting in the great King's army and was wounded at the sanctuary of the great Mother at Thebes.

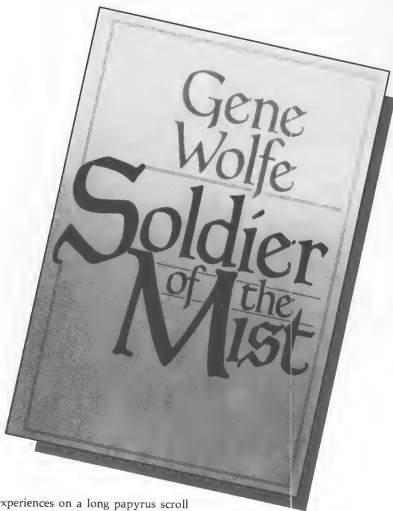
Playing in the Attic

Latro is an amnesiac and apparently suffers from a form of Korsakoff's syndrome caused by a severe head injury. Although he can speak, read, and write, his memory of the past is gone, and he cannot retain new impressions. He is a man without a yesterday. Each day he must relearn about himself and his surroundings: his name, his friends, his immediate situation, and his ultimate task—which is somehow to win forgiveness from the Triple Goddess. Exactly what Latro did to bring about his punishment is not revealed, but it is a fair guess that he profaned the goddess's shrine. But now, to retain some sort of identity, he enters, in Latin, his dai-

ly experiences on a long papyrus scroll that he carries with him and consults whenever necessary.

Latro's experience as he tries to regain his memory and his lost identity are worth recording, for in addition to experiencing the great war between East and West, with its battles and chains of war prisoners, he suffers enslavement, is passed on to the madam of an elite Theban brothel, where he acts as a bully, and is finally accepted as a living good luck token by the Spartan prince and general Pausanias. In addition to day-to-day matters, which Wolfe records in a fascinating manner, there is also Latro's involvement with the populous and

varied supernatural world about him. Gods and demons converse with him as with an equal, and lesser goddesses are willing to offer him advice on how to palliate the goddess he has angered. A detailed prophecy, delivered by Apollo's seeress, describes the stages of his progress to his goal. There is also a shape-changer, who alternates between being a male sorcerer, a beautiful woman, and a Scythian or Sarmatian werewolf. Surrounding all this is a wealth of lore about the folk and high religions of the day.



There is probably no harm in revealing here that Latro is a Roman or other Central Italian, for Wolfe makes it clear that Latro's native language is Latin. What is surprising is that there is a mystery about Latro, and that the Greeks do not recognize his origins. Magna Graecia, as the extensive Greek colonies in Italy were called, would have been in existence for about two hundred years, and there was certainly extensive trade between Greeks and Etruscans, from whose domination the Romans had just freed themselves. It is also surprising that Latro cannot read Greek, since the Italic and Greek alphabets were not very different at this time. But these are minor points, and if Wolfe wishes to disregard them to create a sense of mystery, I should not cavil.

In addition to offering a wealth of lore about Greek life, both sacred and profane, Wolfe has managed to convey the leisurely, episodic movement of the classical epics and novels, in which the hero—as in the *Odyssey*, *Apollonius of Tyre*, and *The Golden Ass*—is more a being acted upon by outside forces than himself an independent actor. This device enables Wolfe to present a wide range of scenes without having to construct a tight plot; it also fits in well with Latro's amnesia.

As a man characterized by perpetual naïveté, Latro is granted the right to wonder about what he experiences, and he can also act with fewer trammels than a normal man. But the reader does lose something by this, for it cuts him off from many of the little idea-tidbits that Wolfe offers. They now become true throw-aways. A typical instance is a hint at the tribal enmity felt between Dorians and Ionians; it is lost without comment, unless the reader happens to know the traditional account of the settling of Greece. Another is the casual dropping of the name Hippocleides, whom the reader will not find in most classical dictionaries, but would be an acquaintance to many college students in second semester Greek. Wolfe says a little about him in the glossary at the end of the book, but the point is obscured. Robert Graves would have built up these little points and delighted the trivia-minded, but Wolfe cannot, since Latro has no memory and no understanding.

It may seem trivial, but I find Wolfe's practice with place names very annoying. *Soldier of the Mist* is unequivocally and indisputably a fantastic historical novel. Two of the

characters so far have proved to be historical, the poet Pindar (somewhat wing-clipped) and the Spartan Pausanias (somewhat sanitized). But instead of referring to real places, Wolfe uses a strange paraphrases, sometimes based on false etymologies that he foists onto Latro. Instead of speaking of Sparta, Wolfe habitually refers to Rope Town and to the Spartans as Rope Makers. Boeotia is Cowland; Phoenicia is Crimson Country; Thebes is Hill; Athens is Thought; and so on. A glossary at the end of the book does not help much. I suppose that this is Heredity Lobo's way of having his cake and eating it, suggesting strange never-never lands, yet



Tanith Lee

sticking somewhat to history, but, since it is omnipresent, I found it most irritating and wished that Wolfe's editors had argued against it.

Latro's story breaks off suddenly and abruptly beneath the walls of Sestos, a fortress-town on the Bosphorus, which historically fell to the Greeks. Latro has just been recognized as a Lucius by a dying Latin friend among the Persian defenders, and two of the minor characters have been eliminated. But it is not clear what is happening to Latro/Lucius. He seems to have regained some of his memory, but has the curse been lifted? I hope not; for I would like to follow him on more of his fascinating adventures through the natural and supernatural.

Stylistic Kaleidoscopy

Tanith Lee, too, has occasionally entered the classical world, as *Dreams of Dark and Light* (Arkham House, \$21.95), a new collection of her short stories, demonstrates. Two such stories are present. The first, "The Dry Season," set against a background of

weather magic in a Near Eastern or North African land, describes the fiasco that results when a quasi-Roman soldier, smitten with love, tries to save a young woman from being sacrificed as a rain offering. He bombs, but so does the story, which is not one of Lee's better pieces. The second story, "Sirriamnis," is more imaginative and much more profound. Narrated by a well-characterized elderly slave who is faithful to the family that owns him, it is a tale of theriomorphy, glamor, and sexual disaster, centering on the magical animal, the hare.

Dreams of Dark and Light contains twenty-one other stories of various sorts, some noteworthy, some not. Four are science fiction, perhaps shading over a little into science fantasy, and are female-oriented. Of them the most significant is "Medra," about a woman whose unconscious mind or dream-self repairs rents in the fabric of the universe. She lives alone in a great hotel, the only human left on an otherwise deserted world. The soldier of fortune who visits her believes that he is looking for the ultimate weapon said to exist on her planet, but he is really only a means for gratifying Medra, summoned by her unconscious self. "Written in Water," a short-short, is the story of the last human being on earth, a woman. Lee offers a welcome alternative to the traditional situation, but it must be admitted that her story lacks the suave punch that Fredric Brown might have given to it.

We usually expect variety and originality from Tanith Lee, and *Dreams Dark and Light* amply fulfills expectations. There are two vampire stories, in both of which she manages to say something new. "Bite-Me-Not or, Fleur de Fur" is an involuted story of guilt, strange eroticism, and cynical sentimentality, told in very purple prose, while "Nunc Dimittis" brings love and service to a branch of the Dracula family. Two stories—"Black as Ink" and "The Gorgon"—are reminiscent of the work of Robert Aickman, though without his solidity. In the first, crime (crossbiting) and the horrible supernatural are mingled in an allegory of death, while the second, not supernatural, has a strong psychological message. "Foreign Skins" is a particularly curious tale in mingling the sordidness of planter life in India, familial brutality, and maturation, with a fantasy episode that might have come from the *Mahabharata* or one of the puranas. "Magritte's Secret Agent" is a fine study of compulsion and mid-

dle class mores, while "Southern Lights," focusing on alchemy and automata, has interesting implications for love and the nature of man. And there is also "When the Clock Strikes," a very nasty version of Cinderella, well worth reading.

These stories and others in the collection show off Lee's stylistic variety and richness. Like a good actress she automatically assumes the manner best suited to her subject matter. Thus, "Because Our Skins Are Finer," which is set on Dula, an imaginary Hebridean or Orkneyan outer island, echos the half-poetic, half-smothered basic English that one associates with the area, while "Bite-Me-Not or, Fleur de Fur" and "Elle Est Trois, (La Mort)" are presented in an outrageously overblown floridness that in a lesser hand would have turned into bad writing or self-parody. Another story, "Reine Blanche," a parable of love and love-crime leaping back and forth through time, is written with the delicacy and simplicity of a fairy tale.

I get the impression, which may be wrong, that Lee's stylistic kaleido-

scopy is not calculated chameleonism, but is the result of a deep emotional submersion in the story, so that when she writes, the story emerges spontaneously in the style she intuitively identifies with her subject. Much of this exuberance would have been blue-pencilled by editors of a generation ago, which would have been a mistake. Usually it is good, but sometimes there are problems, which I would guess are due to hasty writing and lack of revision. At times there are rhetorical mistakes, misused words, odd nonce words, and very strained metaphors. Thus, a "nominative aunt" and "nigrescently stewed" tea are the occasional price that one pays for originality, even if somewhat ludicrous.

Despite Lee's diversity of style and subject matter, there is a range of ideas common to her stories. Most are ultimately stories about sex, and sex that somehow has gone wrong: mistaken identities, renunciation for moral reasons, escape of the lover, miscegenation, victimization, mechanical death, and similar distortions.

Connected with sex in several of the stories is the crushing distortion of birth, as figuratively seen. Thus, the splitting open of bodies for new beings to emerge, as in "Bright Burning Tiger" and "A Lynx with Lions" leads to rebirths that are usually foulness or danger of one sort or another. Death is the punishment for males who exploit women as sex objects. Sometimes this is physical death by violence as in "Elle Est Trois, (La Mort)," when an abused lover apotheosizes into Death the Butcher Lady, and sometimes it is spiritual death, as in "Because Our Skins Are Finer."

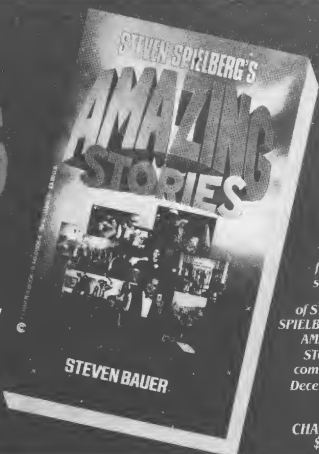
Of the story types included in *Dreams Dark and Light*, the weakest surprisingly, are the heroic fantasies, with one heroine and two hero stories. "Odds Against the Gods" tries to be a light-hearted tale of a picara escaping from oppression into freedom and roguery, but the story does not make it. Even less successful are two very contrived, trick-ending stories based on Cyron, one of the more dismal animus figures that deserves to be eaten by dragons. ■

STEVEN SPIELBERG'S AMAZING STORIES

As fanciful and exciting as *E.T.*,
as adventurous as
Raiders of the Lost Ark

**NOW EXTRAORDINARY
BOOKS FROM CHARTER!**

Gripping, entertaining, and filled with Steven Spielberg's unique sense of wonder, these stories are adapted by Steven Bauer from the teleplays for the NBC-TV series. Offered in two 11-story volumes, STEVEN SPIELBERG'S AMAZING STORIES include "Vanessa in the Garden," "Mr. Magic," "Ghost Train," and many more!



Watch for the second book of STEVEN SPIELBERG'S AMAZING STORIES coming in December!

**CHARTER
\$3.50**

BOOK NOTES

by Jonathan White

Telepathic terrors, Halloween horrors, and numinous encounters.

Strangers by Dean Koontz (Putnam, \$17.95)

The Touch by F. Paul Wilson (Putnam, \$18.95)

Finishing Touches by Thomas Tessier, (Atheneum, \$14.95)

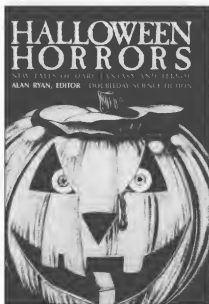
Halloween Horrors, Alan Ryan, ed. (Doubleday, \$12.95)

Close Encounters with the Deity by Michael Bishop (Peachtree, \$15.95)

Under the pseudonym Aaron Wolfe, stranger than fiction Dean Koontz wrote the novel *Invasion* that for a brief time last year, during the hysteria following the discovery of the true identity of Richard Bachman, was believed to have been written by Stephen King. Only the quickest perusal of *Invasion* should have been necessary to disabuse the reader of that idea. For *Invasion* was what no King novel has ever been—boring.

Ten years on, Koontz has written a novel that is four times as long as *Invasion* and is not boring. It is, in fact, a terrific story, beautifully structured.

Strangers is concerned with half a dozen or so people across the country (that vague "or so" refers to another handful of people whose roles in the book are transient), strangers to one another, who are afflicted by nearly psychotic episodes of anxiety that have a number of common elements. The story tells how they become gradually more desperate, seek out answers and, in the process, find one another, figure out what is happening to them, decide what they are going to do about it, and do it.



Koontz, unfortunately, has a rather clunky, sometimes leaden, style. If a sentence carries an implicit message, the next sentence will state it explicitly. There is no grace, nor brevity or wit, and he leaves nothing for the reader to do. This constant spelling out seriously impedes the long mid-section of the book, where the action has slowed somewhat.

In a similar vein, Koontz likes to repeat everything three or four times. One character, for instance, is a young curate named Brendan Cronin, who is suffering a crisis of faith, and the author seems to think we will forget this unless he reminds us of it almost every time Father Brendan makes an appearance.

This may be Koontz's idea of characterization. There is, however, no real characterization in the book, and no real characters. Everybody except the villain—a wildly disturbed army colonel—is an absolute sweetheart,

without the simple human flaws of ego, selfishness, or meanness. They are all generous, friendly, even loving, and mildly insecure. Come on.

Koontz also can't resist jerking the tears. A little of this goes a long way, and there is far too much of it.

Nevertheless, the story is so strong it carries the reader along. With the exception of that protracted middle section, the book is a page turner. The last hundred or so pages are particularly good, and bring the book to a rousing Spielbergian finale. (To be less cryptic would be to give too much away.) If done right, *Strangers* would make a dandy movie.

Touches of Evil

F. Paul Wilson's *The Touch* (Putnam, \$18.95) has a few points in common with *Strangers*. Both books seem to indicate a politically conservative outlook, are strewn with references to some of the authors' favorite books, and have a protagonist capable of healing with a touch. In Wilson's book, however, that protagonist is the central character, and the book itself is half as long, simpler, and better written. The hero of the story, Dr. Alan Bulmer, acquires the ability from a dying vagrant and at first does not even know he possesses it. As he becomes aware of what has happened, his life is deformed—suffering people besieging him, the outrage of the hospital administration, and the insidious loss of memory that accompanies the use of the power. This is pulp fiction with mythic overtones and it moves along with a satisfying inevitability.

Readers of TZ will get a kick out of the back cover photo of the author—right behind him is a collection of Arkham House books.

Thomas Tessier's *Finishing Touches*

(Atheneum, \$14.95) is the best written of the three novels considered in this column, an intriguing examination of the depths of corruption and evil to which a very ordinary man can descend.

This, too, is a book about a doctor, but unlike Wilson, Tessier is conscious of the ambiguities and contradictions in being a man vested with an enormous amount of power and prestige by society who at the same time is ostensibly supposed to be devoted to the welfare of others.

The story concerns a young American, Tom Sutherland, who takes a last chance vacation in London before he is to settle down to his own practice in Connecticut. After a while Sutherland becomes lonely, and almost in spite of himself falls in with an older physician named Roger Nordhagen, who has adopted him as a drinking companion. Nordhagen takes Sutherland to a club where the most delicious food is served, and beautiful women are provided for the least whim or desire. Shown for the first time what privileges are available to a discreet and amoral man of means Sutherland is at first put off and con-



siders dropping the older man. Perhaps sensing this, Nordhagen draws the net tighter by introducing Sutherland to his spectacularly attractive "assistant" Lina Ravachol, with whom the young doctor soon fails head over gonads in lust and love. Lina too lives a fantasy life of sorts—she has filled her flat with things of luxury and beauty; it is designed for pleasure. More and more Sutherland is pulled into a world where gratification is the only raison d'être. His perspective is being altered.

And so when Nordhagen reveals to Sutherland the hell he has created in his basement—the gallery of living surgical experiments who are now his helpless subjects—Sutherland is not sufficiently repelled to walk away from it (let alone report Nordhagen to the police). Nordhagen has shown the younger doctor the most pathological abuse of a medical man's abilities and of the power entrusted to him by his patients. Power not only corrupts, it maddens, and Sutherland and Lina give themselves over to this madness, and finally almost make it sound reasonable.

And of course, Sutherland's descent is matched by the reader's increasing morbid interest, if not fascination, with his journey.

Halloween Horrors

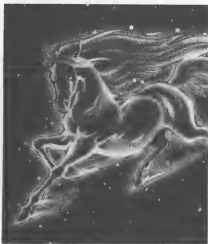
Halloween Horrors (Doubleday, \$12.95) is a timely volume of thirteen tales by as diverse a group of horror writers as might be gathered under one cover. Editor Alan Ryan has brought together such talents as Guy N. Smith (author of such immortal works as *The Sucking Pit* and *Crabs*

on the Rampage), Ramsey Campbell, and Bill Pronzini. Most of the stories here are pretty minor, but they have the advantage of being short and fun. The one exception is Robert R. McCammon's "He'll Come Knocking at Your Door," a story so well realized it deserves to become a classic. Ryan has cannily put it in the front of the book. Among the other stories: Charles L. Grant in a more horrific vein than usual with "Eyes," but still very much in his ersatz-Bradbury style. (Bradbury of course would have been a natural for this volume, but it is probable that the editor's budget did not permit his inclusion.) Whitley Strieber's "The Nixon Mask" is a clever demolition job on the former president and manages to be macabre and funny at the same time. Peter Tremayne's "The Samhain Feis" (pronounced Sowin Fesh, the Celtic name for Halloween) is a well-crafted but rather predictable tale of a boy's ill-fated encounter with a demonic "imaginary" playmate. Steve Rasnic Tem's "Trickster" is excellent (as have been almost all the stories I've read by this not very prolific writer), and the setting, San Francisco in revelry on Halloween night, is richly created. Michael McDowell's "Miss Mack" is an oddly flawed story—the beginning and the ending don't quite go with each other—but the last few pages are as gripping as anything in the book. And Robert Bloch's "Pranks," constructed out of a series of short scenes, is unsurprising but not badly done. An enjoyable collection, and recommended.

Software & Satori

Michael Bishop is an impressive writer. I've never read anything by him that wasn't good—well imagined, impeccably written, alive with ideas. Even when I don't like the story, as is the case with "The Bob Dylan Tambourine Software & Satori Support Services, Ltd." in this collection, I admire the technical proficiency. The book at hand, *Close Encounters with the Diety* (Peachtree, \$15.95), is something of a novelty—a volume of science fiction and fantasy stories concerned with matters spiritual.

I particularly liked the title story, which tells of a severely disabled and deformed near-future physicist who is given the opportunity to take a one way trip to a solar system in formation, and goes—in search of beginnings, of answers, of the veiled place within himself that recognizes his identity with all of creation. And, on the rim of a black hole, he finds what he's



Divine Intervention

Fantasy and Science Fiction Novel

by Julia Ecklar

\$8.00 per Cassette Tape

To order or for information contact:

Air Craft Records

Dormont Square
Pittsburgh, PA 15216
(412) 341-0830

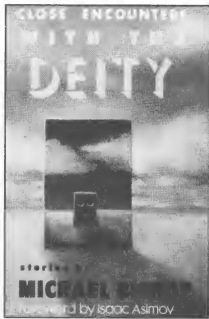
Allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery
Check or Money Order
No Cash Please

sought. This is moving, and one of the few SF stories that deals with the mystical core of Christianity, rather than the trappings. "Voices" captures some of the tone of Tibetan and Indian folklore, the grand scope, the humor. It concerns a boy with a genius for ventriloquism who is called by a voice of supernatural origin. He embarks on a long journey, confronts a deity of sorts on a far mountain, discovers who he is in the process, and returns home, a boy no more.

My favorite story was "The Gospel According to Gamaliel Crucis," which imagines the Second Coming in the form of a sentient giant praying mantis. Bishop has cast his story in the form of a King James bible gospel, and the effect is intriguing—simultaneously reverent and irreverent. This is a brilliant and playful tale, moving but not maudlin, beautifully controlled and, at the end, joyful.

Short Notes:

Scott Spencer, whose first novel, *Endless Love*, was one of the best novels of its year (1979)—and a cinematic mess starring Brooke Shields—has written his first fantasy,



Waking the Dead, Alice K. Turner calls it "extraordinary".... Tanith Lee's *Delirium's Mistress* has been published by DAW as a paperback original. This is the fourth volume in what Lee has come to call the Flat

Earth series, which includes *Night's Master* and *Death's Master*, and is possibly the best ongoing fantasy series. Arkham House has also recently brought out a large collection of Lee's shorter work, *Dreams of Dark and Light*.... Collectors will find the Buckley-Little Catalogue a valuable resource. Listed therein are authors, with their addresses, who will sell their books directly by mail, and autograph them on request. Among the SF and fantasy writers included are Harlan Ellison, Carol Emshwiller, Joe Haldeman, Vonda McIntyre, and Larry Niven. \$12.50 from New York Zoetrope, 80 East 11th St., New York, NY 10003.... Another reference book, and one that I use often, is the *Index to Science Fiction Anthologies and Collections*, second volume, edited by William Contento, which indexes stories published in volumes issued from July 1977 to December 1983. It's amazing how many stories I've located with the help of this book. \$45 from G. K. Hall, 70 Lincoln St., Boston MA 02111. The first volume, indexing stories published through June 1977, is out of print. ■

"From 'The Zanti Misfits' to the man with 'The Sixth Finger,' it's all there, unforgettable, breathtaking, full of wonders. Exhaustive...entertaining...invaluable!"

—Marc Scott Zicree, author of *The Twilight Zone Companion*

Celebrated for its startling visual effects and a creative seedbed of many of the techniques and talents that have made household words of "Star Trek" and *Star Wars*, "The Outer Limits" can be enjoyed forever—with this lavishly illustrated guide!

- Featuring rare photos
- Plot lines, credits, and production background on all 49 episodes
- Commentary by the show's producers
- Information on spin-offs—from pilot films to bubble gum cards.



ACE TRADE \$8.95

Available wherever paperbacks are sold

The **OUTER LIMITS**
THE DEFINITIVE WORK ON TV'S SCIENCE FICTION POWERHOUSE

THE OFFICIAL COMPANION
by David J. Schow and Jeffrey Frentzen

"A DELIGHT PACKED WITH BEHIND-THE-SCENES INFORMATION, STORY SYNOPSIS, HUMOROUS ANECDOTES AND RARE PHOTOS, IT IS A PERFECT GIFT FOR THOSE OF US WHO MARVELED AT THIS WONDERFUL TV SHOW!"
—Marc Scott Zicree, author of THE TWILIGHT ZONE COMPANION

ILLUMINATIONS



THE DARK FANTASTIC

Are you afraid of the dark?

Most of us are, on some level. That fear is partly wisdom, and partly folly. To be sure, the darkness contains much that is dangerous, but it also contains incredible beauty—night-blooming jasmine, the full moon, the nightingale's song.

To many of us, it seems that we live in a time of increasing darkness. All the familiar customs and institutions in which we once had faith are changing with terrifying speed, leaving us bewildered, frightened, and confused.

Recently, however, that ancient and natural fear of the unknown has spurred a wave of withdrawal. We have retreated from adventure at every turn, from exploring space to understanding those who are different from ourselves. It's become dangerous to ask questions, to challenge existing orthodoxies that may have outlived their time—even to dream. This caution has touched the realm of the arts as well. There's a rush to tone down and censor anything which threatens our safe sense of security and order.

But to fear the imagination is to deny a powerful and life-affirming part of ourselves. What we really fear are not the visible threats of our daytime lives, but the shadowy phantoms that exist mostly in our own minds. To blame art, music, even the printed word for our own failure to reach out to one another is to become just a little less human.

All great art is a mixture of the light and the dark.

To deny that contrast is to deny art, and all human endeavor. For a world without shadows is a world of blindness—a world that cannot be seen. It is only by venturing into the unknown, by crossing beyond the safety of our campfires into those dimly lit regions beyond, that true knowledge and inspiration can be found.

You and I are luckier than most. We have a tool that enables us to travel and explore these darker places at the risk of nothing more than our comfortable prejudices and preconceived notions—the magic lamp known as *fantasy*.

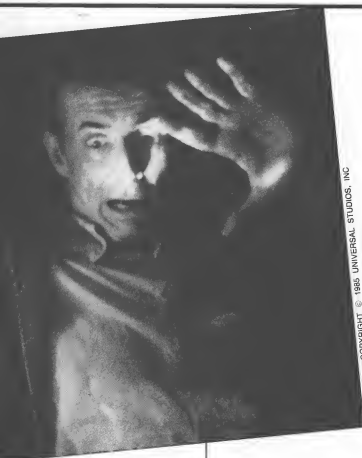
The reference to a lamp isn't just poetic. The word "fantasy" itself comes from an ancient Greek root meaning to *shine forth* or *illuminate*—to cast forth the light of the imagination into uncharted realms to see what *might be* as well as what *is*.

Lately, fantasy has come to have a much smaller meaning. At best it only conjures up unicorns and eleven kingdoms, not the ten thousand strange realms it once encompassed. But it means far more than that.

Rod Serling understood this instinctively when he chose *The Twilight Zone* as the name for his groundbreaking series. He knew that the fantastic can—and should—include both the darkest of terrors and the brightest of wonders. It should touch both the tragic and the whimsical, the science fictional and the supernatural, the surreal and the sublime. If this magazine has any mission, it is to restore that word—that idea—to its larger, more courageous meaning.

—Tappan King

ILLUMINATIONS



COPYRIGHT © 1985 UNIVERSAL STUDIOS, INC.

NORMAN, IS THAT YOU?

If, as we have said in these pages, Anthony Perkins is a haunted man, then Norman Bates is the ghost. Although director Alfred Hitchcock and horror writer Robert Bloch are the dark geniuses behind *Psycho*, it is hard to imagine the film without Perkins's shy, boyish charm. His portrayal of the mild-mannered schizophrenic motel manager struck such a responsive chord in the collective unconscious that even twenty-five years later the actor and his alter ego are often thought of as two sides of the same person—so much so that Perkins has reprised the part in two sequels, *Psycho II* and *Psycho III*.

But, Perkins insists, Norman is a friendly ghost. "He's not himself when he hurts people"

We retain our sympathy for Norman even after he has been exposed as a killer, in part because we have an understanding of his warped psychology. "The subject is a familiar one to many people—a man's troubles with his mother," Perkins says, almost without irony.

Psychologist Bruno Bettelheim says fairy tales help us understand how good people can also be a bad people. Are the *Psycho* films adult fairy tales? "That's absolutely right," Perkins agrees. "Norman is basically good, but he is also extremely dangerous. That's why I avoided prolonging the scenes in which people are killed in *Psycho III*—because I didn't think it was fair to encourage the audience to cheer for him as a killer. It just didn't seem right."

—James Verniere

HORROR IS HER BUSINESS

Melissa Singer scares people for a living.

She aims, she says, to "raise the hairs on the backs of their necks." She's the horror editor of Tor Books.

Horror, Singer says, is anything that frightens people. "Horror can contain psychos, monsters, demons—anything." But putting together the right elements can be a real challenge. "If it's not something *anyone* can go through—that ordinary people can experience themselves when they read it—then it just won't work."

"Horror is definitely expanding," she says. She mentions a recent market survey which found horror was the second best selling segment of the fiction market. Tor has a big commitment to horror, and Melissa Singer stands in the center of that

commitment.

Why do so many people enjoy being scared? "It gives the reader a sense of loss and gain over the situation," she says. "It's a very emotional experience." People identify with the characters in a horror story. For many, Singer thinks, reading horror is a vicarious experience. "They use it to work out real-life aggressions," she says. "The big demon can be the boss at work."

Current Tor horror titles include *Song of Kali* by Dan Simmons, *Death Trance* by Graham Masterton, *The Orchard* by Charles L. Grant, *Brujo* by William Relling Jr., and *Night World* by Robert Bloch.

"Horror should be like a rollercoaster," says Singer. "All the parts can't be that scary—or the ride wouldn't be scary at all."

—Ariel Remler



ILLUMINATIONS

VIDEO FISHTANK

Had enough of the world around you? Imagine yourself on a dreamlike journey from Venice to Florence or from Nara to Kyoto—a magic carpet ride, rich in slow-motion evocative images. Don Pasquella has created a new kind of relaxation medium for our tense, fast-moving society. He has created the Image Tank.

The Image Tank is an example of a new art form called *ambient video*: soothing visual images that transform your television set into patterns of lights, shades, and blurs accompanied by an unobtrusive sound track.

"It's designed to remove you from a tense reality," says Pasquella, the company's president, "It's manipulative imagery."

A video called "Koi" captures the beauty of the Japanese Imperial carp. It creates a fascinating display of the foot-long fish in a series of impressionistic images.

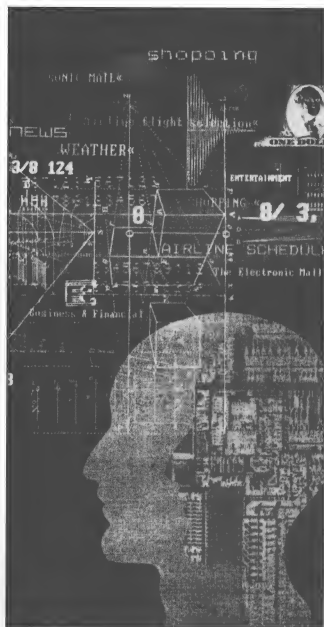
Another work, titled

"Venice," surrounds the viewer with the sights and sounds of romantic Venice, including a serene gondola ride through quiet canals.

Although we live in a video-oriented society, these particular kinds of videos are still relatively new. In Japan, however, the ambient video has been in use for several years. "I walked into a Duncan Donuts while I was in Japan on a recent business trip," says Pasquella, "and there was a large screen with images of running water covering an entire wall."

Unlike television, the Image Tank requires no time commitment whatsoever "I made it so that it can be ignored," says Pasquella. "You can sit down with a book and still be a part of it." And because of the Image Tank's unique overlapping imagery, there is something new to experience with each viewing. "I myself see new things every time, and I'm the one that shot the things."

—Ariel Remler



COPYRIGHT © 1985 COMPUSEIVE

TZ ONLINE

It had to happen. Last year, as we proudly proclaimed on the cover of our October 1985 issue, TZ went high-tech. Now, as a part of our continuing effort to stay two steps ahead of every other science fiction and fantasy magazine on the block, you'll find us in the Science Fiction Forum on CompuServe, the national online information service.

If you dial up Compu-

Serve from your computer on Saturday, October 24, just type GO SCI 29 once you've gotten through, you'll find Tappan King, TZ's Editor in Chief, and Alan Rodgers, who is both Editor of *Night Cry* and Associate Editor of this publication, in a special online conference.

While you're there, you'll find news of TZ's future in the electronic magazine, "Online Visions." Look for it!

—Alan Rodgers



ILLUMINATIONS

SMALL TOWN BOYS: Rod Serling (left) and his older brother Robert in their Binghamton youth.



SERLING MEMORIAL FDN.

TZX

Mark Scott Zicree's *Twilight Zone Companion* has been a source of agony and delight for hard-core TZphiles since its publication. The book is worth celebration because it's well written and constructed and generally a much finer work than it absolutely needs to be.

But the book's index is a sin: it lists very little besides episode titles and their respective page numbers. When we find ourselves wondering, for instance, just exactly which episodes Charles Beaumont wrote, or which ones Burgess Meredith appeared in, we're forced to rely on memory—or search the whole book, cover to cover.

Now an enterprising fan named Howard H. Prouty has done us all a great service: he's indexed the entire series, show by show, against the writers, directors, and selected performers. In the weeks we've had his nifty little index around the office we've already saved ourselves countless hours of poring through the *companion*. (Now, if we could just get someone to index our slush pile...!)

Those interested in purchasing TZX: *The Twilight Zone Index* can get a copy by sending five dollars to: Howard H. Prouty, 6926 Longridge Avenue, North Hollywood, California 91605.

—Alan Rodgers

WILLOUGHBY IS REAL

It's a warm summer afternoon in a quiet town by a river. Balmy breezes gently ruffle the ladies' skirts and turn the leaves of the elms and maples bottom-side up. People pass on bicycles, and young couples stop and rest with their children beneath the trees ...

This could almost be a scene from "A Stop at Willoughby," Rod Serling's classic *Twilight Zone* episode about a harried middle-aged executive who begins to dream of a smaller, quieter place, "a town where a man can slow down and live his life full-measure."

But this town really exists. It's Serling's own home town of Binghamton, New York, model for the imaginary town of Willoughby. Serling always remembered Binghamton fondly. It was a place where he loved to return to rest and refill his creative cup.

And, although more than a decade has

passed since his death, Binghamton still remembers Serling. There's a memorial exhibit here of his life and work, and a lot of fond memories of the boy who once lived here ...

Noon. The church-bells are ringing. I join the townspeople as they gather on the wide lawn of the old high school to dedicate a historical marker in Serling's honor. Rod's favorite teacher, Helen Foley, greets me with a big smile and an affectionate hug. As I listen to the speeches and the music, I can almost hear Rod's distinctive voice speaking about the peaceful, timeless place he called Willoughby:

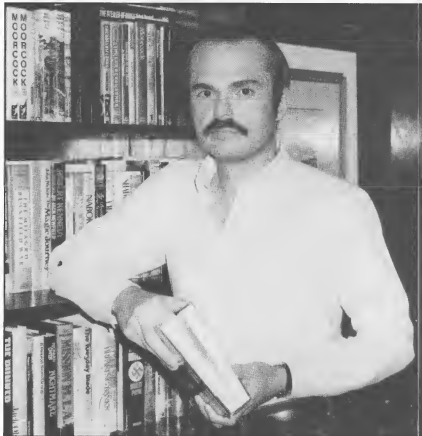
"Maybe it's wishful thinking nestled in a hidden part of man's mind, or maybe it's the last stop in the vast design of things ... Whatever it is, it comes with sunlight and serenity, and is a part of the *Twilight Zone*."

—Jeanne

Van Buren Dann



DEAN & SUSPENSE



An Interview with Dean R. Koontz by Joe R. Lansdale

Strangers, *Dean R. Koontz's* most recent, and perhaps finest novel to date, has reached number fifteen on The New York Times Book Review list and was a selection of the Literary Guild in April.

Other novels of his have made the bestseller lists: *Whispers*, *Phantoms*, and *Darkfall*. But finally, with *Strangers* and an active advertising campaign from Putnam—as well as some reluctant public relations by Koontz himself—he may well be on his way to becoming a household name along with such talents as Stephen King, Peter Straub, and John D. MacDonald. Perhaps now, Dean Koontz will no longer be, as the Los Angeles Times called him, “possibly the least-known, best-selling author in America.”

LANDSALE: Considering the number of books you have written, and how successful most of them have been, why do you suppose it took you so long to get recognized?

KOONTZ: Well, I've never been very hot about doing publicity. My place is at the word processor, telling tales—not jawing about what a swell guy I am and about how my books are better for you than mother's milk. Lately I've done some of it because I have a responsibility to my publishers. I don't feel as much like a self-promoting doofus when the interviewer is someone like you: someone I know, a fellow pro in the field. This is like talking with a friend, so the embarrassment factor is low. Besides, you already know what a swell guy I am, so I don't have to tell you. And of

course my books are better than mother's milk because mother's milk is radioactive these days!

The other thing is, I've written under too many pen names over the years, so the impact of my work is diluted. Now that Berkley is regularly reissuing those pseudonymous works—*Shattered*, *The Face of Fear*, and others—under my own name, we're building up a nice Koontz section in a lot of bookstores, and that helps.

LANDSALE: You got started writing science fiction. Then, just as you were becoming well-known and successful there, you shifted to suspense and mainstream novels. Why did you leave?

KOONTZ: When I left the field, I proclaimed in print that I was getting out because science fiction received no

critical respect, had a narrow audience, and that no one would ever make a decent living at it. Then the last book I wrote in the genre, *Demon Seed*, was made into a film, and when the movie came out the book sold over a million copies worldwide, and I made a bundle. Pretty soon there was *Star Wars*; *Close Encounters*, and science fiction writers were doing just fine. Which goes to show why no one should ask me where the stock market is headed or who'll win the next election. Actually, I think our next president will be Tony Orlando, and that his running mate will be Orville Redenbacher.

LANSDALE: But even after you moved into the mainstream, you had a hard time getting noticed. Do you think your science fiction background made critics treat you like a bastard step child?

KOONTZ: Like an idiot bastard step-child! Eight years after I'd stopped writing science fiction, had reverted the rights to all those early books and had kept them out of print to avoid the sf label, reviewers were still saying, "Here's something different from the science fiction writer, Dean Koontz." I wanted to do a Norman Bates number, go around the country slashing reviewers who did that to me! Sometimes I got seriously reviewed at places like the *New York Times* or *Saturday Review*, where they didn't know about my science fiction past because science fiction was beneath contempt to them and they never looked at it. Gradually, things got better.

But even these days, my stuff baffles a lot of mainstream critics who really like the layered characterization, the thematic structures, and the writing in the more recent books, but who can't for the life of them understand why I do all that work in a novel full of psychic events and creepy-crawlies. Though *Strangers* has gotten many terrific reviews, a few critics essentially say the genre *doesn't deserve* such an effort in craftsmanship. They think that if I'm going to be doing complex books and use the language with a lot of shading, I should get out of the spooking business and write about "important" subjects, whatever they might be. Dickens, Stevenson, and even Shakespeare wrote about ghosts and beasts sometimes, so that's good enough for me.

LANSDALE: I know you had a rough childhood. How do you think that it effected what you write?

KOONTZ: My father had three problems: he drank too much—which is sort of like saying Hitler *warred* too much—and he didn't much care for regular work, and he was given to violence. I mainly remember being scared to death my entire childhood—and not a good scare like horror novels and movies. We were always worried whether we'd have a roof over our heads tomorrow, whether there'd be enough food, whether he'd come home nasty drunk again. I recall lying in bed late at night, hundreds upon hundreds of nights, listening to him screaming at my mother, slamming doors, breaking things.

He was often in bar fights, too, and at least ten major auto accidents over the years. Heck, about the time my first career—science fiction—was making headway, he read what he called "dirty talk" in one of my books, and for six months he was consumed by this irrational anger, refusing to talk to me (not that it mattered, as he had *never* talked much to me), and later he told me that I'd done such a bad thing writing "dirty talk" that he had almost "come down there after you with a gun."

As my Aunt Ginny once said, "You survived childhood only because of your mother and books." Which is true. My mother was a gentle and loving woman, and she did the best she could to shelter me from the darkness in that house. She died young, when I was only twenty-four, before I had a chance to show her what I could do with my writing. Anyway, when my mother's love wasn't enough, there were books—my great escape.

When my father turned sixty-five and was penniless and in poor health, it fell to me and Gerda to bring him to California, get him an apartment of his own, and support him, and the first thing he tried to do was turn us against each other to his own advantage. He never had any respect for women, and he thought it would be pretty easy to get me on his side against Gerda, and it took him the better part of eight or nine years to finally grasp that he couldn't do it. I decided that I would never treat him poorly, that by my treatment of him I would prove I was nothing whatsoever like him. And I'll tell you, there has been much frustration but also some satisfaction in seeing that he didn't want for anything during the last decade or so of his life.

This has affected my work immensely. For one thing, having been

dirt-poor as a child, I have a deathly fear of poverty, so I work a lot. A lot. People think I'm prolific, and I guess I am, but only because I often work seventy hours a week and more! I'm trying to be more reasonable about working hours now that I've carved out a pretty secure niche for myself. But even though my books have sold over thirty-seven million copies, and although I've made all the bestseller lists, I remain edgy about the future. Mellowing out isn't going to be easy!

Another thing—people point out to me how many of my books deal with characters who've had nasty childhoods of one kind or another. I didn't realize how often I use this device until after *Whispers* was published. So whether we always realize it or not, we write about what we are, where we've been, and what we've been afraid of.

LANSDALE: Do you believe that what you write can cause some nut to fly off the handle and start chainsawing his neighbors?

KOONTZ: Well, of course, we all know what happens every time *Romeo and Juliet* is performed: all the teenage couples in the audience go out thereafter and commit suicide. And when *Macbeth* is performed in Washington, there are a score of major political assassinations within the next week.

Jeez! Writers don't *create* life, they only *re-create* it as best they can. How could any writer do his job if he did not write about violence, which is an integral part of human nature? If some nut reads my book and goes out later to commit a murder exactly like the one I've portrayed, I didn't lead him by the hand into crime. He was disposed to it to begin with and, if he hadn't imitated a scene in fiction, he would have written his own scenario for murder.

I'm sick of all the would-be censors. There are as many of them on the left as on the right. The people who want to ban *Huckleberry Finn* for its supposed racism or who protest against other works they find too violent or too patriotic or too politically deviant... well, they're no nobler and no more intellectually elevated than those who want to ban other books because of sexual content. They're all self-righteous, incipient totalitarians.

I do believe violence in a novel should have moral purpose. It should not be used merely to titillate, but to show that violence is only a last resort

and that those who turn to it without compunction are sick. Most anti-violence types can't seem to distinguish between subtle issues of violence in a narrative and just plain pandering, and they are witlessly convinced that merely not reading or talking about such things will eliminate those problems from the world.

LANDSALE: I know you've mentioned in other interviews that John D. MacDonald has been a major influence on your work.

KOONTZ: Let me say something about MacDonald: he is not only the creator of one of the finest series characters of all time (Travis McGee), but he is a master of the language and the craft, which is most apparent in the books he may be least well-known for, the early stuff like *All These Condemned*, *The Damned*, *Cry Hard Cry Fast*, *The Drowner*, *The Brass Cupcake*, and more than a score of others. Sometimes, at writer's conferences, I use paragraphs from MacDonald's books as examples of tight writing, descriptive writing, emotional writing, and just all-around-damn-fine writing, and if I don't identify the author first, the listeners assume I'm reading from one of the establishment's darlings because they can't believe some guy who writes thrillers could be that good when he wants to be. Anyway, I wouldn't be half the writer I am if I'd not had MacDonald's work to read in my early years. Of course, if you don't like my stuff, please don't blame me—blame Mr. MacDonald!

LANDSALE: Who else influenced you?

KOONTZ: Theodore Sturgeon, especially for *The Dreaming Jewels* and *Some of Your Blood and More than Human*. Dickens for the beauty of his language and the complexity of his storytelling. Robert Heinlein and Robert Silverberg. Bradbury, Matheson, Chandler, James M. Cain. Ten years before he made the bestseller list, I was telling people that Elmore Leonard was a classic—and getting a lot of weird looks. He influenced me long after I was a published writer by his example of what could be done through dialogue and apt details. There are a lot of other writers I like, but that's not the same as being influenced by them.

LANDSALE: Do you see any exciting newcomers at work today?

KOONTZ: That's a tricky question. I think there are a lot of promising young writers—at forty, can I still include myself in that category?—but if

I name some, I'm sure to forget others and disappoint when I didn't mean to.

However, there's a guy I'm safe in talking about because he's only had one book published and can't take offense at being called young and promising. I recently read what I think is the best horror novel—borderline horror, anyway—in a couple of years and certainly the best first novel in the genre I can remember. It's *Song of Kali* (Bluejay Books) by a guy I never heard of before, Dan Simmons. The book is incredibly atmospheric. The characters

"I mainly remember being scared to death my entire childhood... Whether we always realize it or not, we write about what we are, where we've been, and what we've been afraid of."

are surprisingly deeply drawn considering the brisk pace, and they ring true. The use of the language falters only occasionally and is generally heads and tails above ninety-five percent of the stuff that's published [Simmons's first story, "The River Styx Runs Upstream," was the winner of TZ's first annual short story contest—Ed.]

LANDSALE: A couple of your recent books are quite different from your past work. *Twilight Eyes* and *Strangers*, for example. Could you tell us about them?

KOONTZ: *Twilight Eyes* was supposed to be a twenty-five thousand-word novelette that would be published in a lavishly illustrated version for collectors. I sat down to write a story with all the stylistic stops pulled out—with a first-person voice that would be richly visual, extravagant in its use of the language, as close to poetry in its rhythms as possible. It's a story of shape-changers and carnivals and Armageddon, and I fell so in love with it that I ended up with one hundred twenty thousand words instead of twenty-five thousand. Chris Zavis, at

Land of Enchantment, published it in spite of its length, with terrific paintings and drawings by Phil Parks. Now I've revised it slightly, added an eighty-thousand-word sequel, and Berkley will publish the entire two hundred thousand words in one paperback volume (without the gorgeous illustrations, however) in autumn of '87. It's far different in tone from what I've done before, but so far readers seem to like it a lot. No poisoned jams or jellies in the mail, anyway!

Strangers was an attempt to write a thriller that transcended the genre in its scope but, primarily, in the kind of emotional response it elicited from the reader. I wanted not only to thrill and spook, but to engender in the reader a really overwhelming sense of mystery, wonder, awe—and a sense of pride and excitement in the whole damn human race. It seems to have worked because it's made all the major hardcover bestseller lists at least briefly, and it's been a Literary Guild Main Selection, but more importantly I've heard from hundreds of readers who've told me that they were deeply moved by the story and that in a couple of places they were brought to tears.

LANDSALE: What's next on the Koontz publishing agenda?

KOONTZ: Well, not long after this interview appears, Berkley will issue the paperback of *Strangers*. In February '87, Avon will do *Shadowfires* under my Leigh Nichols pen name. I dearly love that one, too, because it's about the scariest thing I've written since *Phantoms*. During the entire last half of *Shadowfires*, as I was writing it, the hair was standing up on the back of my neck. Other people who've read it tell me it made their palms sweaty. Happily, Avon promises to package the Nichols books like what they are—thrillers, fright fiction. I was driven half nuts by the romance-oriented covers Pocket Books gave the first four because they aren't remotely romances any more than they are diet books. Right now, I'm finishing *Watchers* to be published in hardcover in March of '87, under my own name, and it sort of melds the mainstream techniques of *Strangers* with some truly horrific stuff. And I've got the next ten novels already in mind, most of them thoroughly planned out, so unless some big scaly thing jumps out of the bedroom closet at night and eats me alive, there's going to be a bunch more Koontz stuff out there in the days to come, whether you like it or not. ■

The pumpkins were creepy, but the man who carved them was far stranger than his creations. He appeared to have baked for ages in the California sun, until all the juice had been cooked out of his flesh. He was stringy, bony, and leather skinned. His head resembled a squash, not pleasingly round like a pumpkin, yet not shaped like an ordinary head, either: slightly narrower at the top and wider at the chin than was right. His amber eyes glowed with a sullen, smoky, weak—but dangerous—light.

Tommy Sutzmann was uneasy the moment he saw the pumpkin carver. He told himself that he was unnecessarily apprehensive, maybe even paranoid. He had a tendency to overreact to the mildest signs of anger in others, to panic at the first vague perception of a threat. Some families taught their twelve-year-old boys honesty, integrity, decency, and faith in God. But by their actions, Tommy's parents and his brother Frank had taught him caution and paranoia. In the best of times his mother and father treated him as an outsider; in the worst of times, they enjoyed punishing him as a means of releasing their anger and frustration at the rest of the world. To Frank, Tommy was simply—and always—a target. Consequently, uneasiness was Tommy Sutzmann's natural condition.

Every December this vacant lot was full of Christmas trees, and during the summer, itinerant merchants



THE

BLACK

by Dean R. Koontz

ILLUSTRATION BY FRANCES JETTER

*Tommy Sutzmann's
jack-o'-lantern brimmed
with a strange
magic—a dark and
evil magic that paid
everyone exactly what
they'd earned.*

PUMPKIN



used the space to exhibit Day-Glo stuffed animals or paintings on velvet. As Halloween approached, the half-acre property, tucked between a supermarket and a bank on the outskirts of Santa Ana, was an orange montage of pumpkins, all sizes and shapes, lined in rows and stacked in neat low pyramids and tumbled in piles, maybe two thousand of them, the raw material of pies and jack-o'-lanterns.

The carver was in a back corner of the lot, sitting on a tube-metal chair. The vinyl-upholstered pads on the back and seat of the chair were dark and mottled and webbed with cracks—not unlike the carver's face. He sat with a pumpkin on his lap, whittling with a sharp knife and other tools that lay on the dusty ground beside him.

Tommy Sutzmann did not remember crossing the field of pumpkins. He recalled getting out of the car as soon as his father parked at the curb—and the next thing he knew, he was in the back of the lot, a few feet from the strange sculptor.

A score of finished jack-o'-lanterns were propped atop mounds of other pumpkins. This man did not merely hack crude eye holes and mouth holes, but carefully cut the skin and the rind of the melon in layers, producing features with considerable definition and surprising subtlety. He also used paint to give each creation its own demonic personality: four cans, each containing a brush, stood on the ground beside his chair—red,

PUMPKIN

BLACK

white, green, and black.

The jack-o'-lanterns grinned and frowned and scowled and leered. They seemed to be staring at Tommy. Every one of them.

Mouths agape. Pointy teeth bared. None had the blunt, goofy teeth of ordinary jack-o'-lanterns. Some even had long fangs.

Staring, staring. And Tommy had the peculiar feeling that they could see him.

When he looked up from the pumpkins, he discovered that the old man was also watching him intently. Those amber eyes, full of smoky light, seemed to brighten as they held Tommy's own gaze.

"Would you like one of my pumpkins?" the carver asked. He had a cold, dry voice that gave each word the sound of brittle October leaves blown along a stone walkway.

Tommy could not speak. He tried to say, *No, sir, thank you, no*, but the words stuck in his throat as if he were trying to swallow the cloying pulp of a pumpkin.

"Pick a favorite," the carver said, gesturing with one withered hand toward his gallery of grotesques—but never taking his eyes off Tommy.

"No, uh ... no, thank you," the boy finally said, his voice thin and with a slightly shrill edge.

What's wrong with me? he wondered. Why am I hyping myself into a fit like this? He's just an old guy who carves pumpkins.

"Is it the price you're worried about?" the carver asked.

"No."

"Because you pay the man out front for the pumpkin, same price as any other on the lot, and you just give me whatever you feel my work is worth."

He smiled, and every aspect of his squash-shaped head was changed by that expression. Not for the better.

The day was mild. Sunshine found its way through holes in the overcast, brightly illuminating some orange mounds of pumpkins while leaving others deep in cloud shadows. In spite of the warm weather, a chill gripped Tommy and would not release him.

Leaning forward with the half-

sculpted pumpkin in his lap, the carver said, "You just give me what you want ... though I'm duty-bound to say that you get what you give."

Another smile. Worse than the first one.

Tommy said, "Uh ..."

"You get what you give," the carver repeated.

"No shit?" Frank said, stepping up to the row of leering jack-o'-lanterns. Evidently he had overheard everything that had been said. He was two years older than Tommy, muscular where Tommy was slight, with a self-confidence that Tommy had never known. Frank hefted the strangest of all the old guy's creations. "So how much is this one?"

The carver was reluctant to shift his gaze from Tommy to Frank, and

The old man was watching him intently.

"Would you like one of my pumpkins?" he asked. His cold, dry voice gave each word the sound of brittle October leaves blown along a stone walkway.

Tommy was unable to break the contact first. In the man's eyes Tommy saw something he could not define or understand, something that filled his mind with images of disfigured children, deformed creatures he could not name, and dead things.

"How much is this one, gramps?" Frank repeated.

At last, the carver looked at Frank—and smiled. He lifted the half-carved pumpkin off his lap, put it on the ground, but did not get up. "As I said, you pay me what you wish, and you get what you give."

Frank had chosen the most disturbing jack-o'-lantern in the eerie collection. It was big, not pleasingly round but lumpy and misshapen, narrower at the top than at the bottom, with ugly crusted nodules like ligneous

fungus on a diseased oak tree. The old man had compounded the unsettling effect of the pumpkin's natural deformities by giving it an immense mouth with three upper and three lower fangs. Its nose was an irregular hole that made Tommy think of camp-fire tales about lepers. The slanted Asian eyes were as large as lemons but were not cut all the way through the rind except for a pupil—an evil elliptical slit—in the center of each. The stem in the head was dark and knotted like a thrusting cancerous growth. The maker of jack-o'-lanterns had painted this one black, letting the natural orange color blaze through in only a few places to create character lines around the eyes and mouth, and to add emphasis to the tumorous growths.

Frank was bound to like that pumpkin. His favorite movies were *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and all Friday the 13th sagas of the mad, murderous Jason. When Tommy and Frank watched a movie of that kind on the VCR, Tommy was always on the side of the victims, while Frank cheered the killer. Watching *Poltergeist*, Frank was disappointed that the whole family survived; he kept hoping that the little boy would be eaten by something in the closet and that his stripped bones would be spit out like watermelon seeds. "Hell," Frank had said, "they could have at least ripped the guts out of that stupid dog."

Now, Frank held the black pumpkin, grinning as he studied its malevolent features. He squinted into the thing's slitted pupils as if the jack-o'-lantern's eyes were real, as if there were thoughts to be read in those eyes—and for a moment he seemed to be mesmerized by the pumpkin's gaze.

Put it down, Tommy thought urgently. For God's sake, Frank, put it down and let's get out of here.

The carver watched Frank intently. The old man was still, like a predator preparing to pounce.

Clouds moved, blocking the sun. Tommy shivered.

Finally breaking the staring contest with the jack-o'-lantern, Frank looked at the carver and said, "I give you whatever I like?"

"You get what you give."

"But no matter what I give, I get the jack-o'-lantern?"

"Yes, but you get what you give," the old man said cryptically.

Frank put the black pumpkin aside and pulled some change from his pocket. Grinning, he approached the old man, holding out a nickel.

The carver reached for the coin.

"No!" Tommy said.

Both Frank and the carver looked at him.

Tommy said, "No, Frank, it's a bad thing. Don't buy it. Don't bring it home, Frank."

For a moment, Frank stared at him in astonishment, then laughed. "You've always been a wimp, but now are you telling me you're scared of a pumpkin?"

"It's a bad thing," Tommy insisted.

"Scared of the dark, scared of high places, scared of what's in your bedroom closet at night, scared of half the other kids you meet—and now scared of a damn pumpkin," Frank said. He laughed again, and his laugh was full of scorn and disgust as well as amusement.

The carver took his cue from Frank, but the old man's dry laugh contained no amusement at all.

Tommy was pierced by a cold fear that he could not explain, and he wondered if he was just a wimp after all, afraid of his shadow, maybe even unbalanced. The counselor at school said he was "too sensitive." His mother said he was, "too imaginative," and his father said he was "impractical, a dreamer, too self-involved." Maybe he was all those things, and perhaps he would wind up in a sanitarium some day, in a room with rubber walls, talking to imaginary people, eating flies. But, damn it, he *knew* the black pumpkin was a bad thing.

"Here, gramps," Frank said, "here's a nickel. Will you really sell it for that?"

"I'll take a nickel for my carving, but you still have to pay the usual price of the pumpkin to the fella who runs the lot."

"Deal," Frank said.

The carver plucked the nickel out of Frank's hand.

Tommy shuddered.

Frank turned from the old man and picked up the pumpkin again.

Just then, the sun broke through the clouds, and a shaft of light fell on their corner of the lot. But only Tommy saw what happened in that radiant moment. The sun brightened the orange of the pumpkins, imparted a gold sheen to the dusty ground, gleamed on the metal frame of the chair—but did not touch the carver himself. The light parted around him as if it were a curtain, leaving him in shade. It was an incredible sight, as though the sunshine shunned the carver, as though he were composed of

an unearthly substance that repelled light. Tommy gasped, and the old man fixed him with a wild look, his amber eyes aglow with promises of pain and terror, and abruptly the clouds covered the sun again.

The old man winked.

We're dead, Tommy thought miserably.

Having lifted the pumpkin again, Frank looked craftily at the old man as if expecting to be told that the nickel sale was a joke. "I can really just take it away?"

"I keep telling you," the carver said.

"How long did you work on this?" Frank asked.

"About an hour."

"And you're willing to settle for a nickel an hour?"



"I work for the love of it," The carver winked at Tommy again.

"What are you, senile?" Frank asked in his usual charming manner.

"Maybe. Maybe."

Frank stared at the old man for a moment, perhaps sensing some of what Tommy felt, but he finally shrugged and turned away, carrying the jack-o'-lantern toward the front of the lot, where their father was buying a score of uncarved pumpkins for tomorrow night's big party.

Tommy wanted to run after his brother, beg Frank to return the black pumpkin and get his nickel back.

"Listen," the carver said fiercely, leaning forward once more.

The old man was so thin and angular that Tommy was half-convinced he had heard the other's an-

cient bones scraping together within the inadequate padding of his desiccated body.

"Listen to me, boy ..."

No, Tommy thought. No, I won't listen, I'll run, I'll run.

However, the old man's power was like solder, welding Tommy to that piece of ground, rendering him incapable of movement.

"In the night," the carver said, his amber eyes darkening, "your brother's jack-o'-lantern will grow into something other than what it is now. Its jaws will work. Its teeth will sharpen. When everyone is asleep, it'll creep through your house ... and give what's deserved. It'll come for you last of all. What do you think you deserve, Tommy? You see, I know your name, though your brother never used it. What do you think the black pumpkin will do to you, Tommy? Hmmm? What do you deserve?"

"What are you?" Tommy asked.

The carver smiled. "Dangerous."

Suddenly Tommy's feet tore loose of the earth to which they had been stuck, and he ran.

When he caught up with Frank, he tried to convince his brother to return the black pumpkin, but his explanation of the danger came out as mere hysterical babbling, and Frank laughed at him. Tommy tried to knock the hateful thing out of Frank's hands. Frank held on to the jack-o'-lantern and gave Tommy a hard shove that sent him sprawling backwards over a pile of pumpkins. Frank laughed again, purposefully tramped hard on Tommy's right foot as the younger boy struggled to get up, and moved away.

Through the involuntary tears that were wrung from him by the pain in his foot, Tommy looked toward the back of the lot and saw that the carver was watching.

The old man waved.

Heart beating double time, Tommy limped out to the front of the lot, searching for a way to convince Frank of the danger. But Frank was already putting his purchase on the back seat of the Cadillac. Their father was paying for the jack-o'-lantern and for a score of uncarved pumpkins. Tommy was too late.

Frank took the black pumpkin into his bedroom and stood it on the desk in the corner, under the poster of Michael Berryman as the demented killer in *The Hills Have Eyes*.

From the open doorway, Tommy
(continued on page 74)

A PERFECT HALLOWEEN NIGHT

*A night to remember
the way things
used to be.*

by Rose Rinaldi

ILLUSTRATIONS BY FRANCES JETTER



It was a perfect Halloween night. The wind whined through the maples, howled around the corners and under the eaves of the houses and sent the dry leaves skidding along the sidewalk. As they walked, there was a satisfying scrunch beneath their feet. It was a perfect Halloween night—or would be if things were as they'd once been.

Helen Dagget looked wistfully at the reddening western sky and sighed. "I miss it."

"Miss what?" her husband asked.

"Halloween. I long for the old rituals when the kids were little: the decorations, the costumes, especially trick-or-treating. Don't you?"

"I guess I do," he admitted.

Helen was lost in thought, remembering the scores of black cats she helped Les and Amy draw to hang in the front window; the yarn spider webs she'd woven for a living room corner; the costumes she'd planned and sewn.

As if reading her mind, Tom said, "Remember how Amy always ended up being a witch? The first week in October she'd make a list of all the things she might be for Halloween: a gypsy, a vampire, a monster, a fairy."

"And every year," Helen added, "around the twenty-fifth, she'd change her mind."

Tom chuckled. "Yep, she'd say, 'I guess I'll be a witch this year,' just as

if that wasn't what she was every year from the time she was three."

"Then I'd have to scurry around and make a black muslin dress and cape, because she'd outgrown the last one, and buy a pointy hat and toy broom to replace the one that had been stuffed under her bed for a year."

They lapsed into silence for a while. The wind increased its howling and the temperature dropped a few degrees. Helen buttoned the top button of her jacket and wrapped her arms around herself.

"Do you know what I miss most?"

Tom asked. "I miss the drive to the Pumpkin Patch on a crisp autumn Saturday just before the thirty-first. Remember how the kids would run up and down the rows looking for the biggest one they could find?"

"And how Les always picked one that was misshapen. He insisted they made the scariest jack-o'-lanterns."

"We'd scoop out the insides, and while you baked us a pie, I'd spread newspapers on the kitchen table and help the kids carve a wicked face."

"He was right about the misshapen pumpkins, wasn't he, Tom?"

"Sure was. We had the best jack-o'-lanterns on the block."

"It's so quiet tonight. Except for the wind, I mean," Helen said. She looked quickly over her shoulder and then scolded herself. "Silly old lady!" she said and did a quick double step

to keep up with Tom's long stride.

"Halloween was fun for our children, wasn't it?"

"Sure, but it was even more fun when I was a boy. We really knew how to celebrate then."

"I suppose you and your rowdy friends knocked over a few outhouses in your day?"

"Yep. Soaped our share of windows, too. It's just too bad what's happened to Halloween."

"At least our kids enjoyed it, and we didn't have to worry about some psychopath putting razor blades in their apples or shooting poison into their candy bars. There were thirty-five kids poisoned or cut in Portland last year."

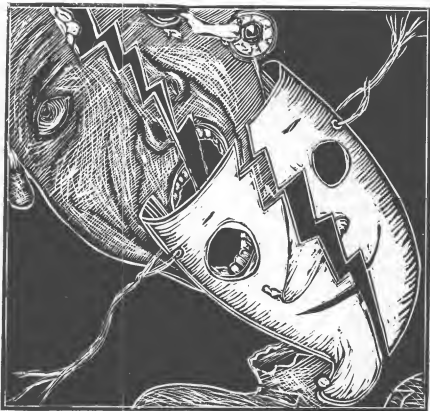
"Try not to think about it, Helen."

"How can I not think about it?" She was quiet for a while, thinking, mourning for lost good times, feeling bad for the kids. "I don't envy parents tonight. I wouldn't want the job of trying to find something fun and safe for the kids."

Tom looked as somber as his wife. "Wonder what the poor little tykes will do this year now with the city ordinance banning Trick-or-Treating?"

"Some of the schools are sponsoring parties," she said. "Mrs. Johnson next door is chaparroning one of them."

(continued on page 33)



THE SPIRIT OF THINGS

They'd returned to reclaim their own special season.

by John Skipp

They were screaming downstairs, in Bob Wallach's apartment. He couldn't tell how many people Bob had down there with him.

"Damn it all, I tried to warn him," Wertzel hissed. It didn't help. The floorboards thudded and death-twitched beneath his feet. Books and knickknacks threatened to tumble from their perches. Something snapped and shattered against a wall below: furniture, bone, he couldn't be sure. A window exploded into tinkling shards. The stereo died in mid-song, groaning.

The screaming got louder, crazier. Wertzel swallowed painfully and white-knuckled the handgrip of his .45. Something decidedly not human shrieked. The screaming got worse, if that was possible.

A single lightbulb burned in the center of the white ceiling. Jake Wertzel sat directly below it on a rickety wooden chair, his back pointed toward the only featureless wall in his third-floor walk-up studio apartment. To his right were the windows that faced Thirty-seventh Street. To his left were the doorway to his closet, his bathroom, the hallway, and stairs beyond. Before him lay the kitchenette, the unusable fireplace, his bed.

Every entrance to the room ... the windows, the doors, the mouth of the fireplace ... was completely boarded up and blockaded. He hoped

that it would be enough.

The walls and the floorboards were ceasing to shudder. The screaming, which had continued to mount, now began to disassemble into its component parts. He could distinguish maybe half a dozen voices all veering off toward their separate grand finales; this one, a woman's spiralling up toward the ultrasonic as if someone or something were slowly twisting a dial; this one, a man's trumpeting dissonant jazz that closed with a jagged, moist burbling sound; this one, which could have been either sex, rattling off a string of syllables that ended, very clearly, with the word *no*. Wertzel knew for a fact that was the word, because it hovered in the air for a good ten seconds before something made a sound like shredding paper and silenced it.

There was more. Much more. *Wallach must've been having some kind of a party*, Wertzel thought bitterly. *Maybe he thought there was safety in numbers*. A pair of voices warbled and whooped in screaming, agonized harmony. *Stupid-goddam kid. I tried to warn him ...*

The screaming stopped, abruptly. And the feeding sounds began.

Wertzel cupped his hands over his ears, clammy shields against the horror. A blood-red ocean roared and surged inside his head. It was better, but it was not enough. He wanted to hum something, set up a monochro-

matic drone that would amplify itself against the confines of his skull, drown out the cracking and smacking and slurping from below. He didn't dare. The tiniest sound might be enough to attract them. Even his breathing was carefully modulated for silence.

It went on for five minutes that seemed very much like forever.

Jake Wertzel was a squat, stocky man in his late thirties; barrel chest, paunch beneath it, massive arms to either side. Twenty years on the loading docks will do it to you. His features were pinched and unlovely; his hairline had receded all the way to the back of his head, crowning him with a bald plateau that shimmered in the light from the bare bulb in the ceiling. He looked like a man who had known much hardship, very little happiness. He looked exactly like what he was.

He wished to God that he were not so horribly alone.

He remembered the dogs. Fleetingly, absurdly, he wished that they were still alive, wagging their tails or lapping at his cheeks or humping his knees with witless abandon. He had picked them up at the Humane Society three weeks before, anticipating the holiday rush: a pair of big, stupid, ungainly mutts that he named Haystacks and Calhoon. Wertzel had done his human best to remain detached from them, knowing what fate had in

store. But three weeks is a long time: more than enough time to grow fond of them, their brainless devotion. More than enough time to make him miss them now.

At 10:45, the absolute latest that he could wait, Wertzelt gave the last supper to Haystacks and Calhoun. The Purina Dog Chow was laced with enough sedatives to knock out an army; he wanted to make sure that they felt no pain. Fifteen minutes later, they were down for the count.

Wertzelt had dragged them out into the hallway, gutted them, drawn a huge cross on the door with their blood, and left them on the mat: paws up, tongues lolling.

Then he had gone back into the apartment, locked and bolted and nailed the door shut, boarded it up with heavy planks he had taken from skids at the loading dock, pushed the chest of drawers in front of it and moved to the chair in the middle of the room.

To wait. And hope.

It was now twenty after twelve.

The witching hour had struck.

And they had come.

"Oh God," he moaned, and was startled by how loudly the words boomed in his ears. His hands jerked away from the top of his head, and he realized that the downstairs had gone almost completely silent. There was a faint airy sound that might have been the hissing of the pipes. Somehow he didn't believe it.

Why me? he thought. Why here? Why now? Last year the worst of it had gone down in Chelsea and the Village. The year before that ... the first year ... had laid waste to much of the Upper East Side. If there was a pattern there, Wertzelt couldn't see it; but he'd hoped that the horror would focus itself uptown again, give him enough time to save up enough money to maybe get the hell out of New York before the fall.

As if there were anywhere safe to go.

Most of all, he wished that things would revert to the way they used to be. He wished for the sound of children's voices, giddy with laughter and hoarse with demands. He wished for cheesy plastic masks, eye holes sliced in ratty sheets, prosthetic warts, and theatrical blood.

He longed for the days when it was easy to pretend that the whole thing was just a joke.

Gone now, his mind whispered silently. All gone. All gone ...

They were coming up the stairs.

Wertzelt felt his bowels tighten like a hangman's knot. Ice water drained down his spine and gathered in the pit of his stomach. His scrotum constricted like a slug under a magnifying glass, and hot moisture like acid seeped into his eyes from the unlimited slope of his forehead.

They were coming up the stairs. He didn't know what they were, what they looked like, how they moved. He didn't want to know. They made sounds that his ears rejected as unreal,

*He wished things
were back the way
they used to be,
He wished for
the sound of
children's
laughter, for
plastic masks,
eye holes sliced
in ratty sheets.*

though his heart and soul knew better. They skittered and slithered and fluttered and muttered and howled like brain-damaged hyenas from Hell. One of them made a noise like a spoons-player in a jug band; it moved along the stairway wall with incredible speed, blasted down the hall toward him, clattered across the length of the door in a split second, raced halfway up to the fourth floor and came all the way back before the others reached the third floor landing.

One of them made the walls shake as it approached.

I will not move, he urged himself with a silent, sickly whining voice. *I will not scream. I will not loose control.* He prayed that the sacrifice would work. Rumor had it that blood offerings had been known to, on occasion.

Wertzelt found himself wishing, suddenly, that he'd sacrificed a child instead; supposedly they worked the best. But killing the dogs had been bad enough.

At the time.

They were coming down the hall. They were coming to his door. The books and knickknacks that had

threatened to tumble down made good on their promise, slamming and shattering against the floor, filling the room with gunshot echoes that ricocheted off the walls. The heavy chest of drawers rocked back and forth on its heels like a Bozo punching bag. The kitchen cupboard flew open; plates and saucers and glasses and cups exploded into the sink like a string of firecrackers.

Wertzelt screamed and pissed himself. He couldn't help it. The crotch of his Lee jeans ballooned with moisture, and wet sticky tendrils crept down his thighs while his mouth flew open and all the terror in his heart flew up, up, and out in a torrential spasm.

"NO PLEASE GOD NO PLEASE NO OH GOD PLEASE DONT KILL ME! I ... I ..."

In the bathroom, behind the boarded-up door, the toilet flushed.

"... I ... I ..."

A light came on in the sealed closet. There was the sound of rending fabric.

"... I ..."

Something scratched against the window, screeched, and flapped its leathery wings.

"I GAVE YOU A SACRIFICE!" he bellowed. "I GAVE YOU A SACRIFICE, PLEASE DONT KILL ME, OH GOD PLEASE I'LL DO ANYTHING YOU WANT ..."

Silence.

Jake Wertzelt fell back in his seat, breath catching in his throat. The room had stopped shaking. Nothing moved. Nothing fell.

Silence from the bathroom.

Silence from the closet.

Silence from the windows.

Silence from the hall.

Wertzelt held his breath for a good thirty seconds, not daring to believe. Silence.

Slowly then, he let out a long shuddering exhalation. The muscles in his face twitched; the corner of his mouth arched tentatively upward in smile. He let the useless .45 dangle by one finger like an ornament on an artificial tree.

Then he started to cry.

And God, did it ever feel good to cry, to let out all the pent-up emotion, to bask and wallow in the fact that he was alive! He was alive! and no sound remained to haunt him but the manic intermingling of his own tears and laughter, punctuated by the steady ...

(Drip. Drip. Drip.)

Of what? He laughed and cried some more. It could have been swollen teardrops, landing at his feet. It could

have been the piss, still dribbling down his legs. Lord knew he had dropped enough fluids in the last few minutes to account for any amount of ...

(Drip. Drip. Drip)

It was coming from above him.

He opened his eyes.

The room was turning red.

(Drip. Drip. Drip)

He looked up.

There was a quarter-inch of blood at the bottom of the lightbulb in the center of the ceiling, directly above his head. He looked up just in time to



watch the tiny blue spark catch off the filament, just before the bulb blew up, showering him with blood and broken glass.

And total darkness.

Wertzel shrieked and hit the floor on his hands and knees. The glass bit through his clothes, his skin, sinking into the meat and lodging there like bee stingers. He yowled and rolled over, his back erupted with pain.

The toilet flushed.

Light winked on under the closet door.

Something dragged its talons along the window glass outside.

And the spitfire staccato of the wall-climbing thing burst out from the hole in the wall behind the oven, the hole he had forgotten to patch, the hole that now allowed it entrance. Like a Methedrine freak with a pair of spoons so fast that he barely had time to aim the .45 in the direction of the sound and fire.

In the muzzle-flash, he could see the scuttling crabthing turn inside out and spray all over the kitchenette. Then it was dark again. Totally dark. Spots danced in front of his eyes. His ears were filled with the hiss of melt-

ing metal as the crabthing's guts ate holes in the oven, the Frigidaire ...

Not total darkness.

In the fireplace, something was moving. He could see it through the cracks between the boards, red and yellow and orange like flame. But brighter. More solid.

And moving.

A pair of tiny flaming hands pried their way between the boards. The wood crackled and blackened and parted at their touch. A tiny head poked through the opening.

It stared at him.

And suddenly Wertzel knew why there would be no more plastic masks, no tattered sheets with holes for the eyes, no warts and scars and blood from the lab. Suddenly, he knew why they had come.

They had been watching, and waiting, for a long long time. They had watched the Church march arrogantly across the face of the earth, twisting the old pagan holidays to suit it, stripping and homogenizing away all meaning, then positing nonsense in its place.

And though centuries passed like seconds to them, it still dragged on too long. Where the Great Dark Ones had once strode the earth, there now stood Kolchak, the Night Stalker and Casper, the Friendly Ghost. They had seen the shitty movies. They had read the shitty books. They had seen themselves turned into limp-wristed Bela Lugosi and carrot-headed James Arnesses, heard too many bad actors get the spells all wrong and conjure up demons that couldn't scare the fleas off a pink-nosed bunny.

Worst of all, they had seen All Hallow's Eve transformed into a ritual for posturing, preening babies; had seen their glorious faces mocked and strung up in too many dime-store windows. For far too long.

But that was over.

Wertzel understood it all, staring into those coal-black, ageless eyes.

He understood perfectly.

He started to scream.

Then the windows imploded, and the front door flew apart like a matchstick house in a hurricane's hands, and the Old Ones slithered and stalked and soared into Jake Wertzel's third-floor walk-up apartment in beautiful Godless midtown Manhattan.

After a while, the screaming stopped.

And the feeding sounds began.

Halloween. It ain't just kid stuff. Any more. ■

PERFECT HALLOWEEN

(continued from page 30)

He shook his head. "It's not the same. A party is pretty tame stuff to kids used to trick-or-treating. Nothing compares to being out late, after dark, without your parents around. Walking up and down the streets in a pack, imagining what might be behind the next corner ... what might answer your next knock."

Helen gave an involuntary shudder at that. "Do you realize we haven't seen one child this evening?"

"They've probably all gone to the party at the elementary school," he said.

"All of them? Not very likely. You'd think we'd see one or two children around."

"What's the matter, Helen? Letting your imagination run away with you? Scared you're going to see a spook? Think maybe the goblins don't know they've been voted out of existence by the city fathers?"

"Don't, Tom."

"Don't what?"

"Make jokes ... about goblins and things."

"Now, Helen, just calm—" his voice stopped.

"What is it?" she said, taking his arm.

"Probably nothing." He was staring into the inky darkness.

"What do you think you see?" When he didn't answer, she said again, "What do you see ... ? I didn't bring my glasses." She had an edge of hysteria in her voice.

He didn't answer. He didn't have to. Even she could see them now.

There were at least a dozen of them, all ages. Helen wasn't sure why they frightened her. After all, she'd known some of these children since they'd been born. Maybe it was the way they stood, completely blocking the sidewalk, arms at their sides, held slightly out, holding them. The sticks.

She looked at Tom and saw the look of puzzlement on his dear face. He grabbed her and pivoted her around. But coming from down the block was another group—even larger—advancing slowly, with the same arms-akimbo stance.

He gave a little sigh and held her close. "I guess this is what they're doing this year." ■

PROBING BY FIRE:

**Craig
Spector
talks with
David J.
Schow about
rock'n'roll,
horror, and
the cultural
mulch**

They say that when the going gets weird, the weird turn pro.

But hey, don't believe *Them*. See for yourself. Been to the movies lately? Go see *Highlander*. Go see the six-foot-seven, two hundred-pound immortal with the rudely shaven head—slit throat held shut with *safety* pins, for God's sake—careening around in stolen Cadillacs, kidnapping old ladies, burping in church and generally behaving like a hyper-adrenelated blowup of the same spike-and-spandex, beady-eyed crew found every night on bargain-basement videofests like U68's *Heavy Metal Hour of Power*.

Or go home and flip on the VCR. Suddenly it's David Bowie and Catherine Deneuve, trawling for fresh flesh in some nameless and depraved afterhours rock-noir nightspot. The demented lead singer of Bauhaus growls the lyrics to "Bela Lugosi Is Dead." Light pulse. Bodies writhe. And B & D bring whole new meanings to the concept of coitus interruptus, all in the first five minutes of *The Hunger*.

Slap off the VCR and cue up a record. Relax to the lush and haunting strains of Sting's latest. Check out the fine print on the back, right where it says "Moon Over Bourbon Street" was inspired by *Interview with a Vampire* by Anne Rice.

There's just no escaping it. Sex and Death. Rock and Roll. Fantasy and Horror. It's enough to make the elegantly circled ladies of the PMRC shit little Tiffany cufflinks.

I love it.

You see, my partner and I write scary stuff.

Our first novel, *The Light at the End* (Bantam), was about a punk vampire trouncing around in the icky New York subway system. But we also write rock music, ninety-nine percent of which is tied directly into our stories. And we've always thought the two went together naturally, like some twist variation on that candy commercial:

"Hey, you got rock music in my scary stuff!"

"No, you got scary stuff in my rock music!"

Two great tastes that taste *great* together.

And we're not the only ones who feel that way. Not by a long shot. Horror and rock'n'roll have been eyeing each other for years now, and they've finally hopped into bed. In video, in films. And now, increasingly, in fiction.

Which brings me to David Schow.

Veteran *TZ/Night Cry* readers know his work: short stories that are as good a literary equivalent as you're likely to find to full-blast, broad-spectrum rock'n'roll. He admits to



DAVID J. SCHOW

regularly dosing himself with hefty infusions of West Coast post-punk tribal music—loud, edgy stuff, like the Dead Kennedys and the Butthole Sufers—as well as the more sophisticated textural sounds of Cocteau Twins or Tangerine Dream. He maintains it's an ongoing attempt to stave off the ravages of Old Fartdom. It would appear to be working. And what's more...

David J. Schow has written a

rock'n'roll horror novel! It's called *The Kill Riff* and it's due out soon from Tor Books. He says it's about "the emergence of a certain type of sociopath as a response to the sort of hyper-accelerated social mutation expressed by the idea of having rock concerts in places called *arenas*, called *coliseums* ... where, once upon a time, you could go see hapless folks get impaled on tridents and eaten alive by leopards ..."

You see what I mean. It's inevitable. Dave's gotta write one, we gotta write one, all God's chillun gotta write a rock'n'roll horror novel.

I asked him what he thought about these strange bedfellows; about the changing face of fiction and fear, and where it's all likely to go. Here are some of the highlights:

SPECTOR: There's been this tremendous intermedia meltdown occurring lately: rock music selling films, film music selling records, videos selling film and records, actors, directors, and rock stars all intertwining ad infinitum. Now we're seeing an enormous outpouring of fiction, and particularly horror, that is heavily rooted in rock'n'roll. How do you see it fitting in?

SCHOW: Perfectly. Horror is nasty; it tries to bite you, and I'm not just talking gross-out horror. Good rock'n'roll has *teeth*. When horror succeeds, when rock'n'roll succeeds, they're dangerous. They shake things up. And you must continue finding new ways of staying dangerous, otherwise you become comfy and secure and boring. And that's not what contemporary horror—or rock—is all about.

SPECTOR: The walls separating mediums seem to be growing more diffuse especially in this "new wave" of horror—Clive Barker's *Books of Blood*, for example, are kinetic, very cinematic. And John Skipp's story "The Spirit of Things" [in this issue] has a very strong auditory element. Fast and frenetic and *in your face*.

SCHOW: I think we're going to be seeing a lot more of that. There's a growing awareness across this entire generation of horror writers regarding the lasting effects of the cultural mulch we were spawned in: the mix of TV, monster movies, rock 'n'roll, and Vietnam ...

SPECTOR: Not to mention drugs, pornography, and the offside chance of thermonuclear annihilation ...

SCHOW: Yeah. That too. We absorbed it all directly as kids because

we had no defenses built in yet, no ideals in place to be violated. Inevitably you use, as an adult, what you got as a child. And what we got came along in the period between *The*



CRAIG SPECTOR

Haunting of Hill House, say, and *The Exorcist*. One result is that we've developed a more cynical coping mechanism. It's got a real brutal edge to it, an almost defiant vision.

SPECTOR: Another is that we tend, increasingly, as creators and consumers, to view our media as sort of a system of interlocking catalysts. One medium sort of triggers another.

SCHOW: Funny you should mention

that. Actually, my story "Red Light," which appears in this *very* issue, was triggered by the Siouxsie and the Banshees song of the same name.

SPECTOR: I read those lyrics. Nasty stuff—

SCHOW: Yeah, the lyrics to the song do not exactly relate directly to the story, nor did they even inspire the events in the story. But there were certain things that evoked images in my brain, words like "Kodakwhore" and "shutterslut," that reminded me of some people I'd known who were modeling, who were real low-wattage actress/starlet types. You see a lot of them in Hollywood. The futility of their existence and the tremendous rejection that these people have to put up with on a daily basis does tie in directly. People who are gorgeous by any conventional standards can lose a job because one tooth is a quarter of a micron off. The constant abuse and pressure to be perfect turns them into strange creatures indeed. That, combined with the idea of the camera constantly nicking little pieces out of your soul, just nickle-and-diming you out of existence ...

SPECTOR: So the song created the catalytic ambience, of sorts, that triggered the series of memories that led to the story.

SCHOW: Something like that.

SPECTOR: So another synapse connects, as musicians write music inspired by books, and writers write stories inspired by music.

SCHOW: While art imitates life which inspires art ...

SPECTOR: And since fiction and films are tied together in the marketplace, and films and music are likewise linked, it's only a matter of time until fiction and music connect fully, and we start seeing all manner of hybrid cultural experiences.

SCHOW: Music to read by, maybe?

SPECTOR: Book/tape combos ...

SCHOW: Total sensory involvement.

SPECTOR: What about olfactory?

SCHOW: [ominous] It's the last taboo ...

SPECTOR: [laughs] Scratch'n'sniff novels?

BOTH: Ooooooooooooooh ...

SCHOW: [laughs] Hopefully, this whole cross-pollination effect will help to obliterate some of the artificial genre-and-media distinctions that always seem to hem everything in. Maybe even inspire on both sides people to punch some holes in the ghetto walls.

SPECTOR: Or maybe, just maybe, we'll learn to walk *through* them. ■





THAT THEY RED LIGHT

*Each time the shutter clicked, the
camera stole a little bit more
of her soul.*

by David J. Schow

ILLUSTRATION BY CARL WESLEY

Tabloid headlines always make me laugh. You know: *I Aborted Bigfoot's Quints*, or *See Elvis' Rotting Nude Corpse*, or *Exclusive on Jack the Ripper's Grandfather!* Earlier today, while passing one of those Market Street news vendors, I saw similar hyperbolic screamers, and I laughed. I did not want to laugh; it came out as a sick coughing sound.

TASHA VODE STILL MISSING
Terrorist Kidnapping
of International Cover Girl
Not Ruled Out

What the hell did they know about her? Not what I knew. They were like vampires; they sucked, ethically. Morally.

But what did that make *me*?

At the top of the dungheap was

the good old *National Perspirer*, the hot, steaming poop on Tasha's disappearance, and how one of three juicy fates had befallen her. One: She had pulled a Marilyn Monroe. Two: She had had a Dorothy Stratten pulled on her by some gonzo fruitbag lover. Three: She was tucked away in the Frances Farmer suite at some remote, tastefully isolated lunatic asylum.

Or maybe she was forking over richly to manufacture all this furious controversy in order to boost her asking price up into the troposphere—in a word, hoax time.

It was pathetic. It made my gut throb with hurt and loss, and downtown San Francisco defused behind a hot salt-wash of welling tears. I blamed the emissions of the Cal Trans buses lumbering up and down the street, knowing full well I couldn't cop

RED LIGHT

such a rationalization, because the buses ran off electricity, like the mostly-defunct streetcars. Once, I'd nearly been decapitated by one of the rooftop conductor poles when it broke loose from the overhead webwork of wires and came swinging past, boom-low, alongside the moving bus, sparking viciously and banging off a potted sidewalk tree a foot above my head, zizzing and snapping. Welcome to the Bay Area.

I had no real excuse for tears now, and wiped my eyes with the heel of my hand. My left hand; my good hand. I was still getting used to the weight of the new cast on my other one. One of our famous denizens of the streets had stopped to stare at me. I stared back, head to toe, from the cloud of gnats around his matted hair to the solid-carbon crustiness of his bare, black feet. He had caught me crying, with his mad-prophet eyes, and the grin that snaked his face lewdly open suggested that yes, I should howl with grief, I should pull out a Mauser and start plugging pedestrians. I put my legs in gear instead, leaving him behind with the news kiosk, the scungy, sensationalist headlines, and all those horrifyingly flawless pictures of her. The bum and I ceased to exist for each other the moment we parted.

I know what happened to Tasha. Like a recurring dream, she showed up unannounced on my doorstep just four days ago. Like a ghost then, like a ghost now.

People read *People*. The truth, they never really want to know, and for good reason.

Her real name was Claudia Katz. In 1975, nobody important knew my name, or either of hers, and I'd already shot thousands of pictures of her. When I replaced my el cheapo scoop lamps with electronically synchronized umbrella shades so new that their glitter hurt your eyes even when they weren't flashing, I commemorated the event by photographing her. New Year's Eve, 1974—five seconds before midnight, I let a whole roll rip past on autowind, catching her as she passed from one year into the next. Edited down, that sequence won me a

plaque. Today, it's noteworthy only because Tasha is the subject.

"Claudia Katz is too spiky and dykey," she explained later, as she pulled off her workout shirt and aired a chest that would never need the assistance of the Maidenform Corporation, breasts that would soon have the subscriber of *Playboy* eating their fingernails. "Claudia Katz is somebody who does chain mail and leather

I know what happened to Tasha. Like a recurring dream, she showed up unannounced on my doorstep, four days ago. Like a ghost then, like a ghost now. She knew exactly where to find me. Maybe she followed the light.

doggie-collar spreads for Bitch Records. Claudia Katz is not somebody you'll find on the staple page in *Sports Illustrated's* Swimsuit Issue."

I pushed back an f-stop and refocused. "Part your lips. Stop. Give me the tip of your tongue, just inside your teeth." Her mouth was invitingly moist; the star-filters would trap some nice little highlights. *Click-whirr click-whirr*. "Tilt your head back. Not so much... stop." I got a magnified closeup of the muscles beneath her skin, moving through the slow, programmed dance of positions. My big fan was on, making her amber hair float. "Hands together, arms back over your head. Turn, turn, turn... whoa, right there, stop!" *Click-whirr*—another thousandth of a second, immobilized. "*Sports Illustrated*? Why bother aiming it at a bunch of beer-swilling beat-offs in baseball caps, anyway?"

"You don't understand the way the world works, do you?" She spoke to the camera lens, because she knew

I was in there, watching. "You've got to make people look at your picture and either want you, or want to be you. When they anticipate your next picture, that means they're fantasizing about you. Saying to themselves, 'Geez, I wonder what she looks like in bed, without that damned bathing suit on!'"

It was my privilege to know the answer to that one already. Grinning, I baited her: "The women say that, do they?"

"No, not the women, you dork." The warm, come-hither expression on her face was entirely contrary to her tone. She was, after all, very good at her job. *Click-whirr*. "The men. When all the men in the country, in the world, lust for you, then you can say no to the lot of them. If all the men want you, then all the women lust to be you. Voilà."

"Excluding lesbians, Tibetan lamas and some Kalahari bushmen." Her reply begged my sarcasm. She expected it. "Not that, um, lust and envy aren't admirable goals..."

If I had not been shooting, her brow would have rearranged and a familiar crease would appear between her eyes, indicating her annoyance at my childish, defeatist, irrelevant, smartass remark. And then she'd say—

"You just don't understand." Right on cue. "But I'll be on top someday. You'll see."

"I'd like to see you on top after you finish your shower." It flew out of my mouth before I could stop it. File a lawsuit if you want. "It's your turn."

She decided not to blow up, and rolled her eyes to keep from giggling. *Click-whirr*. My heart fumbled a beat. I'd just netted a shot of an honest-to-U.S.-Grant human being, peeking out from behind a cover-girl facade of plastic. Nude from the waist up, sensual not from flaunted sexuality, but because her expression let you in on the secret that the whole sham was strictly for laughs and wages. A real woman, not a fantasy image. I wanted that photo. It reduced the rest of the roll to an exhausted, mundane repertoire of tit shots—pretty billboard face, pasted-on bedroom eyes of that inhuman chromium color, the "ideal," a dime per double dozen from one shining sea to the next, from the four-star hookers at the Beverly Hills Hotel to the smartly attired, totally paranoid corporate ladies who took their Manhattan business lunches in neat quartets.

"To hell with the shower," she had said then, lunging at me with mischief in her eyes.

I still have that photo. Not framed, not displayed. I don't make the effort to look at it anymore. I can't.

Claudia—Tasha—got precisely what she wanted. That part you know, unless you've spent the last decade eating wallaby-burgers in the Australian outback. The tiny differences in the way we perceived the world and its opportunities finally grew large enough to wedge between us. Her astronomical income had little to do with it. It was me. I made the classic mistake of trying to keep her by blurting out proclamations of love before my career, my life, was fully mobilized. When you're clawing through the riptide of your twenties, it's like a cosmic rule that you cannot be totally satisfied by your emotional life and your professional life simultaneously. We had been climbing partners, until I put everything on hold to fall in love with her. So she left, and became famous. Not many people know my name even today. They don't have to; I pull down a plush enough income. But it did come to pass that everybody wanted Tasha. Everybody still does.

I was halfway through my third mug of coffee at the Hostel Restaurant when I admitted to myself that I was consciously avoiding going home. Bad stuff waited for me out there. A Latino busboy had made off with my plate. Past the smoky front windows, Geary Street was acruise with the bun-boys that gave the Tenderloin its rep. In New York, where things are less euphemistic, they're called fudge-packers. I wondered what gays made of all the media fuss over Tasha.

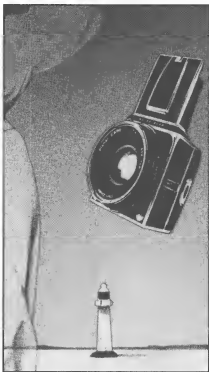
Nicole was giving me the eye. She's my favorite combat-hardened coffeshop waitress in the chartered universe, an elegant willowspout of West Indies mocha black, with a heaving bosom and a lilting, exotic way of speaking the English language. When I watch her move about her chores at the Hostel, I think she'd probably jump my bones on the spot if she thought I could *click-whirr* her into the Tasha Vode saddle—worldwide model, budding cinema star, headliner. And still missing. When I try to formulate some logical nonsense for what happened to her, I fail just like I did with the street bum. Nothing comes out. Instead, I watch Nicole as she strolls over to recharge my cup. She watches me watching her.

"How'd you know I wanted more, Nicole?"

She narrows her panther eyes and blesses me with an evil smile. "Because

you white boys always want more, hon."

My house *cum* studio hangs off the north end of the Fieldings' Point Pier, which is owned by a white-maned, sea-salt type named Dickie Barnhardt, whom no mortal dares address as "Richard." He sold me my home and plays caretaker to his pier. I live in a fabulous, indifferently-planned spill-



together of rooms, like building blocks dumped haphazardly into a corner. Spiderwebbing it together are twelve crooked little stairways, inside and out. At first I called it my Dr. Seuss House. On the very top is a lighthouse tower that still works. Dickie showed me how to operate it, and from time to time I play keeper of the maritime flame because the notion is so irresistibly romantic. In return for spiffing up the place, I got another plaque—this one from the U.S. Lighthouse Society in San Francisco. Lighthouses have long been outmoded by navigational technology, and the Society is devoted to a program of historical preservation. There's no use for my little beacon. But there are nights when I cannot bear to keep it dark.

After ten years without a postcard, Tasha knew exactly where to find me. Maybe she followed the light. I answered my downstairs door with the alkaline smell of developer clinging to my hands; the doorknob was greened from all the times I'd done it. And

there she was.

Was I surprised? I knew instantly it was her, knew it from the way the ocean tilted and tried to slide off the edge of the world, knew it because all the organs in my body tried to rush together and clog up my throat.

"You look like you just swallowed a starfish," she said. She was burrowed into a minky-lush fur that hid everything but the tips of her boots. The chill sea breeze pushed wisps of her hair around. I don't have to describe what her face looked like. If you want to know, just haul your ass down to Slater's Periodicals and check out the covers of any half-dozen current glamour and pop-fashion magazines. *That's* what she looked like, brother.

Her eyes seemed backed up with tears, but maybe tears alone were insufficient to breach the Tasha force-field, or maybe she used some brand of eyeliner so expensive that it was tear-resistant. I asked her why she was crying, invited her in, and then did not give her room to answer me. I was too busy babbling, trying to race past ten years in ten minutes and disguise my nervousness with light banter. She sensed my disorientation and rode it out, patiently, the way she used to. I fixed coffee and brandy. She sipped hers with picture-perfect lips, sitting at the breakfast overlook I'd glassed in last summer. I needed the drink. She needed contact, and hinted at it by letting her leg brush mine beneath the booth-style table. My need for chitchat and my awareness of the past hung around, dumbing things up like a stubborn chaperone. Beyond the booth's half-turret of windowpanes, green breakers crashed on to the rocks and foamed violently away.

Her eyes cleared, marking time between me and the ocean outside. They grew darkly stormy, registering the thunderheads that were rolling in with the dusk to lash the beach with an evening sweep of rain.

At last I ran out of stupid questions.

She closed her hand up in both of hers. My heartbeat meddled with my breathing. She had already guessed which of my odd little Caligari staircases led to the bedroom loft.

The night sky was embossed by tines of lightning somewhere between us and Japan. Fat drops splatted against the seaward hurricane glass and skidded to the right as a strong offshore

(continued on page 78)

Fractures

*He was in love with a stranger,
the ghost of the woman she
might have been.*

by Kim Antieau

ILLUSTRATION BY J.K. POTTER

Most mornings I awakened next to Lina. She would gently press herself against me or turn, half-asleep, to caress my chest, and then I would know it was Lina. Usually, she pulled off her satin nightshirt and flung it across the room, laughing when it landed on the edge of the mirror where she had aimed it. Then we would make love, barely noticing the sun sifting through peach-colored blinds and bleeding pastels onto the carpet and bedspread. Sometimes she blinked and Nick was there in those pale blue eyes; other times she stiffened slightly and Teresa was in my arms. Most mornings it was just the two of us.

One morning a few days before Teresa's birthday, I opened my eyes and found Teresa sitting on the edge of the bed, staring at me, her features sullen.

"You love Lina," she said. "You wish I were gone."

"Of course I love Lina," I said, getting out of bed and stretching. The ocean was a slender strip of blue through the blinds. "I love you all, Tess. You are all the same person."

Teresa shook her head and looked down at her hands. I imagined Lina holding out her arms for me, smiling, shaking her light brown hair so that it brushed her bare shoulders.

"Remember, Adam, I met you first," Teresa said.

I went around the bed and sat

next to her. She leaned against me stiffly, burying her head against me, fitting into every curve of my body. I put my arms around Teresa.

"You wish you were holding Lina, don't you?" she murmured.

I pulled away. "I'm taking a shower," I said.

I closed the bathroom door behind me and turned on the water. I knew I shouldn't get angry with her. Every year near her birthday and the anniversary of her father's death—and the "birth" of Lina and Nick—Teresa grew moody and depressed. This year her depression seemed worse, and it was affecting all of them. She told me once it was like a wound opened inside her this time every year, reminding her that her father had died and she had broken into pieces of three. And every year, she believed that day, her twelfth birthday, would become clear to her. It never did. She did not remember a minute of that day after learning her father had died in a car accident.

I got under the shower and let the hot water massage my back. The curtain opened and Lina stood there smiling.

"Care for some company?" she asked.

She stepped into the tub and pulled me toward her.

After breakfast, Lina and I went down to the beach. The day was bright; sunshine glittered the water in white and shadowed blue. We spread





FractureS

a towel on the sand. Lina pulled out a sketch pad and began drawing while I lay down and put my hands beneath my head and stared up at the cloudless sky, wondering when I would finish the wood sculpture I had started a month ago. I let myself be talked into too many days on the beach. I turned on my side and watched Lina; of course Lina could talk me into anything ever since I met her three years earlier.

I did meet Teresa first, at college, a few months past her twenty-first birthday. She had just inherited the fortune her father had left in trust before he died, and a few weeks earlier, she had ended nine years of unsuccessful treatments and visits to doctors who couldn't help her. She left her mother's house and bought her own in southern California. I was majoring in art and business—I couldn't make up my mind which would be the easiest and the most profitable—at one of the few schools in California that hadn't dropped me because of poor grades. Teresa, who was in my art class, was pretty and shy and I asked her out. We had a nice dinner, but near the end of the meal I was thinking of other things and had to struggle to keep my attention on her and our dinner.

Then Lina came out. What was there about Lina? All things stirred alive when she was around, and she noticed them all even while concentrating solely on me. That night we talked for hours. At the time, I was getting pressure from family and friends for spending too much time in school or not enough time in school and generally not doing anything with my life. Lina never asked me what I "did." I fell in love almost on the spot.

Later that night I met Nick. It was certainly the strangest date I'd ever had. When Teresa took charge again, she was impressed that I liked them all and that I didn't think she was insane.

Some months later she had work started on a studio for me next to her house, and I moved in with her. It was the first time in my life that I felt settled, as if I finally had something that held my interest.

"I didn't sleep well last night,"

Lina said, pleasantly interrupting my reminiscences. "I dreamed of Russell. We were dancing under a hot red sky."

Russell. It had been some time since she had talked about Russell, her long-lost love. Nick had a former lover, too. The doctors claimed the lovers were not real, only metaphors for the loss of Teresa's father.

Lina put down her pencil. "It was just the two of us, Russell and me. I knew I should be happy, but I was frightened. I'm not sure why. The sky was so hot. Perhaps I was afraid he was going to melt under that sky and be lost to me. To save him, I forced myself awake, but he was gone anyway."

*That night I
awakened to the
sound of crying
next to me. I
stroked her hair
and put my arm
under her
shoulder, drawing
her close, not
certain who it
was I held.*

I turned onto my stomach. Metaphor or not, conversations about Russell bothered me. He was undefinable and untouchable, an unreal first love she would never forget. She looked off across the ocean, thinking, I knew, of him.

It was a look in her eyes I never saw when she gazed at me. It made me feel strange, that look, like an intruder in her life.

"I wish I could go to the ocean," she said.

"Lina, you are at the ocean."

"What? Oh yes. Silly me." She stood and reached for my hand. "Come on. Let's play." She pulled me up and then let go of my hand and raced away down the beach.

"I'm sorry about this morning," Teresa said, eating her fruit salad slowly. We sat in the breakfast nook looking out across the sand and ocean. Ferns moved slightly in the breeze coming through the screens.

The tiny squares of the screen muted the bright sunshine, and the day appeared hazy.

"That's all right," I said.

"It's just difficult," she said, looking down at her plate. "I thought I had accepted them as part of my life, but when I first come back and you realize Lina is gone, you seem so disappointed."

"Nonsense," I said, twirling the ice in my glass before drinking the tea. "It just takes a moment to get used to whoever is in charge."

"I want me in charge," she said. "All of the time."

"Do you want to go back to therapy?"

She shook her head. "That wouldn't do any good. I'm not crazy. I've just got two other people sharing my body."

"Right," I said. This was another way Tess had of not facing the truth. Whenever I asked her where Nick and Lina came from, she never had an answer unless I pressed her, and then she would finally sigh and say, "From my head, I guess." I wished she would go back for help. I knew if she got well, with all the personalities blended together, Lina would dominate. She'd have to: Nick was male, after all, and Teresa was so—unrelaxed. Lina was care-free and happy. Once she was well, her life would be easier, and Lina would realize Russell was a fragment of her imagination.

Teresa looked up at me, tears in her eyes. "I want to make you happy."

I reached across the table and squeezed her hand. "You do."

"I want you to be happy with me," she said.

I pushed away from the table and walked around it to her. I kissed the top of her head.

"I am happy with you," I said, resting my hands on her shoulders. "Now finish up and we'll take a walk."

I opened the door and went into the blinding sunshine and sat on the steps. Some time later, the door opened and Nick stepped out.

"Hello, Adam. How's everything going?"

I smiled. Having Nick in charge was always the most disconcerting. He was a gentle, kind person who walked and moved like someone who was accustomed to a larger body, as if he was afraid of nothing. In the twelve years Nick had been "alive" he had never gotten used to Teresa's body.

"Hello, Nick," I said. "Out a little early today?"

He nodded. "I guess so. Anything

wrong with Teresa?"

We started walking down the beach together. "She was a little depressed this morning," I answered. "She was complaining about not being in control enough."

Nick shook his head. I knew none of them had control over their comings and goings, and none were aware of the other ones, except through second hand information. They each came into and out of existence, usually dividing the waking hours into three sections.

"I was surprised not to see you last night," I told him. "Lina and I had a good time, though. We danced all night."

"You may have been surprised, but I bet you weren't disappointed," he said, grinning. I laughed.

He stopped, bent over, and picked up a stone. He turned it slowly in his hand once and then threw it at the ocean. "Laura could dance," he said. "I was so clumsy, but she taught me how. I liked it best when she stopped and danced by herself to show me a step. She was so graceful." He smiled. "I would like to dance with her again someday. You know, our families didn't approve of us, so we had to

sneak around."

"Oh?" This was new. When Nick and Lina came into being, they hadn't even had names until Teresa's mother gave them ones. As time passed, they had invented their past loves, Russell and Laura, but they had never before gone into specifics about them.

"Why didn't your folks approve?" I asked.

He shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe we just thought they didn't approve, to make it more exciting. And it was so exciting when we were together, and painful. Every moment was so excruciating; the longing was so intense." He glanced at me and then back at the ocean. "But that was a long time ago, wasn't it?"

He turned to me again, and Teresa was there, crying.

"I want to go to the ocean," she said, holding out her hand to me. "I want to go home."

That night I awakened to the sound of crying next to me. I put my arm under her shoulder and drew her close, not certain who it was I held. I stroked her hair and told her everything would be all right. She turned to me and pulled at my clothes

and kissed me hard. I slipped her nightgown over her head, kissing her, caressing her. As I entered her, I whispered, "Lina," and her body tightened and she began crying again. "It's Tess, Adam, Tess." Then she relaxed and pushed against me, moving, undulating, whispering in my ear. Only it wasn't Teresa, or Lina, it was Nick, calling out to Laura. I moved over him, trying not to hear, then I looked down and it was Lina, holding me, smiling, whispering. I put my head near her lips, wanting to hear her words as we moved together, and then it was me who wanted to cry, feeling Lina's skin against mine as she whispered another man's name.

Before falling asleep again, they told me they wanted to go home. I lay awake listening to them breathing quietly next to me. I had tried to take this relationship as it came, to accept it as normal. But it wasn't normal. I had just made love to three different people in the same body. I shook my head. No, that was wrong. They were all one person and I loved that person. I closed my eyes and tried to sleep. I wanted her well. Perhaps a trip back home would help her. She

(continued on page 86)

The Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural

"An endlessly fascinating volume—simply opening it anywhere will demonstrate that . . . an uncommonly handsome book."

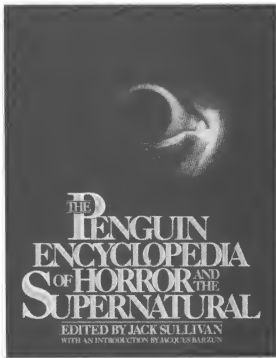
—Jonathan White, *Twilight Zone*

OK horror fans—put this number one on your Christmas lists! *The Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural* is the only complete horror reference work. With over 700 entries and 54 essays from such noted talents as Bleiler, Campbell, Disch, Fiedler, Goulart, Klein, Strieber, Weinberg, Wilson, Winter, and many others, this indispensable book spans centuries of horror legends, works, personalities, authors, artists, and movies.

Stunning 8½ × 11 format • 482 pages • 300 b&w illustrations



Viking



Available at your local bookstore, or send \$29.95 plus \$3.00 postage and handling to: Dept. JEG - 1, Viking Penguin, Inc., 40 W. 23rd St., New York, NY 10010

UHENS RL MBY DPM CZ IF

U
Y
M
O
Y
Y
T
L
N
R
Y
T
N
Y
F
T
K
L
O
D
Y
J
L
M
R
A
C
T



FW RL MBY LBFKQW HFTK



THE CRYPTOGRAM

*Beyond the tangled thicket of letters
lay a pathway to another world.*

by Donald R. Burleson

ILLUSTRATION BY WARREN GEBERT

S ettled comfortably into the worn and faded old chair that so well knew his shape, Alex lit his pipe and glanced quickly over the editorials, then folded his *Cumberland Mirror* back to the amusements page. The pipe smoke eddied in soft gray patterns in the warm cone of yellow light from his lamp, and he felt cozily ensconced there, all the more so with the night wind outside brushing the windowpanes with pattering strokes of chilly rain. The Freudians, he vaguely reflected, would deem his snug comfort an unconscious desire to return to the womb or some such, no doubt; but then who asked them?

Smiling to himself, he let his eyes travel down the familiar layers of comic strip panels. Had any one of the strips been missing or out of order, he would instantly have known; he was, he supposed, very much a creature of habit.

That evidently was some of what Dinah, on the sofa in her own island of lamplight across from him with her magazines, managed to love in him, and certainly was some of what he loved in her. Nowadays to have been married thirty-five years to the same spouse was something of a rarity, and you didn't have this kind of marriage, placid and secure, unless you accepted each other for what you both were,

finding even in one another's foibles a kind of gentle commonality of spirit. Dinah was in many ways very predictable; at this moment, without looking,* he could have told you the names of the half-dozen magazines stacked in her lap, for they would always be the same half-dozen magazines. She was in her own little world with them, as he was in his, and the nice thing was that, even so, they were together, the private little domains subtly intertwined by long-standing knowledge of each other's habits.

As he went through his accustomed pattern with the amusements page, he knew that she knew, in some quiet corner of her mind, just what he was doing, what he always did. The pattern: scan the comic strips, then move on to the crossword puzzle.

But, as always, not without a glance at the cryptogram on the way by. The evening *Mirror* ran one in every issue. He never attempted to solve it, just looked at it and went on. Tonight it had as formidable an appearance as ever:

MBYJY RL TCMBRTE RT MBY
QCHK MBFM NFTTCM
DICPY MC UY F KCCJ MC
OTSTCQT JYERCTL

With the usual little explanation of how a cryptogram is formed by

THE CRYPTOGRAM

substituting letters for other letters: maybe S for A, maybe K for B, et cetera.

It wasn't, he felt, intellectual cowardice that caused him every night to pass over the cryptogram with only a wistful glance, and go on to the crossword puzzle. It was merely a question of what one knew how to do and what one didn't know how to do. If you knew how to swim, you swam; if you didn't, you occupied yourself with something you did know how to do. Now, in the crosswords, he would be in his element—he knew his European rivers, his Hebrew letter-names, his "comb. forms" as well as anybody who ever wielded an eraser, by God. But the cryptogram always struck him as an impenetrable barrier; how would one even begin? Passing over the enigma always reminded him of a mysterious old battered wooden door he used to walk past every morning when he was a kid on his way to school. He had always rather tingled to know what was on the other side, but whatever it was, it wasn't for him; it was always locked, and he always walked on.

Shifting his pipe in his mouth, he started to attack the crossword puzzle, but for some reason stopped. If you didn't know how to swim . . .

Maybe you tried to learn.

He looked back at the cryptogram, rather surprised at himself. Well, after all, he wasn't a total idiot, and if they put these things in the paper, it must be possible for people to solve them. Right? More a question of overcoming laziness than anything else.

He stared at the nonsensical tableau of letters, and at first felt helpless, felt as if he were looking at the sort of jumble a child's alphabet blocks might present, spilled on the floor, only there were too many weird letters, J and Q and the like all over the place. But—

There was a one-letter word. Wouldn't that be "a"? Well, maybe "I." His pencil hovered, uncertain. What about the little word MBY—couldn't that possibly be "the"? Well, hell, there must be hundreds of other—but wait, if MBY were "the" wouldn't MBYJY be "there," or "these"?

"Ha!" With a vigorous puff of smoke, he pencilled in "the" over MBY, and "there is" over MBYJY RL.

"Did you say something, dear?" Dinah was looking up at him over her bifocals, a magazine page half turned.

"Ah, no. I mean, did I?"

She smiled indulgently. "Well, I thought you did. The crossword must be an interesting one tonight."

He shook his head, scattering bright swirls of pipe smoke. "No, I'm solving the cryptogram."

"Oh." She looked surprised at this break in the eternal routine. "Well, good luck, dear." She went back to her magazine.

And he to his adventure. If M was "t" and B was "h," then MBFM

As he stared at the page, it was as if he were looking at a membranous portal, becoming embedded in it, slipping through.

was—"that." And the one-letter word was "a" after all. The pencil darted like a predator through the cryptogram, filling in the known letters. Outside, the wind heightened, as if in parallel with his own excitement, and dashed more rain against the darkened windows; the sound seemed to enclose him, to wrap him more insularly in his yellow wash of smoky lamplight, where he concentrated on the display of letters before him. It might seem no big thing, he mused, scanning the cryptogram for further clues, but to him—ah. MC had to be "to," and he had another new letter.

Odd, he reflected; this was an opaque barrier to me before, but now—now it's like a thin membrane stretching ever thinner, letting me slip through. RT had to be "in," and the third word TCMBRTE had to be "nothing." He was doing it, by damn, getting through the barrier. At some point he thought Dinah had said something to him, but by the time he glanced up she had left the room. The pencil scratched and scribbled faster, filling in new letters; whole new words

began to take form. As he stared at the newspaper page, the metaphor of the thinning barrier seemed at moments to become physical fact; it was as if he were literally looking at a membranous portal, and becoming embedded in it, and slipping through. There—now the last of it was clear.

There is nothing in the world—

The wind at the window seemed to muffle itself, to grow distant in his ears.

—that cannot prove to be—

The lamplight grew grainy and dim, and his eyes saw only the words.

—a door—

His senses narrowed to this one sensation, this incredible sensation of passing through.

—to unknown regions.

Dinah sat in the bedroom combing out her hair before the mirror. Dear fragile soul, she thought, smiling. Dear Alex, so excited over a little—but then it wasn't so little a thing was it? Alex was a man who had his routine, knew his boundaries, and so seldom struck out in any new direction that this must be quite pleasing for him, a veritable triumph. He hadn't even looked up when she said she was going to get ready for bed. But then he was always—

A figure came to fill the doorway in the mirror, and she turned to face him.

"Alex, darling, did you—"

She stopped, comb in hand, staring at him where he stood illumined by the peripheral glow of the bedside lamp. She knew every tiniest detail of him, every slightest nuance of being, right down to that little red birthmark on his finger, that characteristic way he cocked his head before speaking, that funny cowlick behind his left ear.

And in some deep and incomprehensible way, with an icy little clutch of fear beginning to spread up her spine, she knew that this was not her husband, even before he stepped closer and began to speak.

"KRTFB, QBFML QJCITE? QBYJY FI RT?"

She stared at him wide-eyed, dropping the comb, her mouth open and ready to scream. He gesticulated wildly with his hands, his face bright with his own alarm.

"WCQJY TCM KRTFB!"

She did scream then, long and loud.

As did that other poor woman, alike faced with a stranger mouthing what was gibberish to her, worlds away on the other side. ■

STEPHEN KING INTERVIEW:



THE TRUTH ABOUT "IT"

America's
Ghostmaster
General discusses
Halloween,
childhood, and his
newest "monster"
bestseller.

by Tyson Blue

IT, Stephen King's newest novel, currently riding high on the nation's best-seller lists, is just the vanguard of what is undeniably his most productive year to date. The novel, a complex, intertwining tale of horror spanning more than a quarter of a century, is a milestone for King in many ways.

"*IT* is a monster novel," King explains. He's right—in more ways than one. First, it's a massive *magnum opus*, 1144 pages in all. But King also sees it as the *ultimate* horror novel. "It's about *all* of 'em. I mean, the Mummy's in it, and Frankenstein's in it ... I always wanted to do this. I thought, It's gotta be like you'd find in a museum, find some way to put that all in, you know? Everybody's got to be in there, so ... it's the end!

It's the *last* monster novel!"

Set in the fictional town of Derry, Maine, in 1958, the novel concerns a group of six children who confront a monstrous creature which lives in the sewers beneath the town and emerges every 28 years or so to kill. Believing they have destroyed it, they go their separate ways.

Then, in 1985, the last member of the group remaining in Derry makes six phone calls, and all across the globe, the others, their hearts filled with dread, drop what they're doing and begin to return home. For it has started again....

But there is more to *IT* than that.

"The book is a summation of everything I've done to this point," King says. With the publication of *IT*,

King plans to finish his exploration of the theme of horror and children, which has been a mainstay of much of his work to date. "The idea is to go back and confront or relive your childhood, so that you can be whole."

But this major turning point for King is only one reason why this just may be the most important year in his already phenomenal career. From now until fall 1987, King fans will have more new material to enjoy than ever before. Because of the tremendous sales of *Thinner* after it was discovered that King and Richard Bachman were one and the same, King's publishers agreed to allow him to release four novels in a very short time. There are also at least two films in the works, and one limited-edition book.

The King juggernaut began back in July with the release of King's directorial debut, *Maximum Overdrive*. King says he did not really want to direct the film at first or even write the screenplay. But his dissatisfaction with previous film versions of his work prompted him to try his hand.

"I became interested in this idea of having all the gadgets in the world do what we know they're doing to us anyway—get us!" he says. "I think I saw the ultimate in machine paranoia at a press conference in New York. This one guy showed up with two of these little tape recorders, because once he'd interviewed Tip O'Neil and gotten five minutes of conversation and then *Hmmmmmmmm*. That's just the start, too—in five years he'll be showing up with six of them!"

Although he says he probably will direct another picture, King is frank about admitting he did not like the experience.

"It's a job," he explains. "It's working for someone else. And that means that there's somebody who can jerk your chain a little."

Other aspects of the experience bothered King as well—like living in a house "decorated in Fourth Century Horrible, with all these plastic flowers, like a mortuary in Disneyland." Or washing his clothes after three weeks "because I didn't have any left that didn't smell like dead monkey meat" and finding the pockets stuffed with money because although he was paid \$1,200 a week for directing, he was only spending about ten dollars a day for food on the way to and from the set. "So much for the glamour world of movies."

Maximum Overdrive was followed by Rob Reiner's *Stand By Me*, an outstanding film adaptation of King's short novel, *The Body*. The film drew a new audience to King films that might not normally attend, and earned kinder critical attention as well.

But it is with the printed word that the tidal wave of King material really begins. Late this year or early in 1987, his novel *Eyes of the Dragon* will be published in its first trade edition by Viking Press. Set in the Territories, locale of *The Talisman*, *Eyes* was originally published in 1984 in a lavish limited edition from King's own Philtrum Press.

"It's a sort of fantasy thing that I did mostly for my daughter," King says of the book. "She doesn't like horror, really, and I wanted to do something that she'd like because I

love her. So it's really a children's story."

"But," he adds, "any children's story should be a story for grownups, like *Treasure Island* or *The Hobbit* or something, where you can read it to a child and the child will love it, but you can see or hear reverberations in the story that maybe the child doesn't hear because he doesn't have the same experience."

The next book, *Misery*, set for release in mid-1987, was originally intended to be another Richard Bachman book. Although not strictly a horror novel, the book deals with one of King's own personal nightmares—warping fans.

"*Misery* is just the most awful thing," King moans. "It's a suspense story, like *Cujo* in the sense that it's

STEPHEN KING ON TRICK-OR- TREATING:

"Get as much candy
as you can—and
watch out for the
monsters!"

set entirely in one room—well, there's also the cellar . . . It's about writers and their fan followings. It's about a novelist who has an accident, a novelist who's written a number of romance novels about this Victorian character Misery Chastain, who rises above her difficulties, and he's gotten into this business of writing books he doesn't really care for."

Paralyzed in a car crash in the Colorado Rockies, the writer finds himself the prisoner of a psychotic nurse who also happens to be his biggest fan.

"She hooks him on drugs and keeps him in a room," King explains. "And she says, 'you're going to write a book just for meeee!' And it's pretty clear that what she means to do when he's done is to kill him and bind the book in his skin. It's a *pleasant* little tale. . . ."

The last book of the cycle is *The Tommyknockers*, a science fiction novel which King says deals with our obsession with powerful gadgets—like *The Bomb*—which, although we think we can control them, have the potential to destroy us.

Also coming during this period is

the second book in King's ongoing epic fantasy, *The Dark Tower: The Drawing of the Three*. Although King was still working on the book as this article was being prepared, publisher Donald Grant, who also published *The Gunslinger*, the first book in the cycle, says: "I expect the manuscript in by September. We expect to have it out by the first part of 1987, at about the same time as Douglas Winter's King bibliography."

And after this unprecedented wave of material has washed over the reading public and broken, what then?

"Well, the 'Unexpurgated *Stand*' project is back on," King says. He is referring to his restoration of this apocalyptic novel, originally published in 1978, of 400 pages of "material trimmed at Doubleday's request because they felt the book was too long."

"That'll happen along about 1988 or '89 or something like that," King says. I think I'll do these four books and then there won't be anything else but that 'Unexpurgated *Stand* for a while." Why? "Because it's *time*. I mean, you do kind of wear people out after a while and they say, 'Oh well, it's another Stephen King book. Ayuh. Big deal.'"

Does he intend to keep writing during his layoff, or, like John Lennon, just watch the wheels go round? "I've got a family to take care of, to be with," King answers, "and I gotta be alone with myself sometimes and stuff like that. You know, just sorta let the well fill back up."

Although this sabbatical is one King has planned for a long time, his readers can only wonder if a man who is used to working every day can just kick back and turn it loose for a while. After almost twenty years as a working writer, and after delivering so much fine work to avid readers in such a short time, he's certainly entitled to a break.

With Halloween approaching, it seemed only fitting to ask America's "Ghostmaster General" if he had anything to tell the legions of young Things That Go Bump in the Night as they prepare to set out on their annual hauntings of their neighborhoods. His eyes gleaming mischievously, King just grins and says: "Get as much candy as you can—and watch out for the monsters!"

(Note: The author would like to thank Stephanie Leonard and Castle Rock Press for invaluable assistance in the preparation of this article.) ■

In 1954 a U.S. Senate subcommittee on juvenile delinquency opened hearings to determine the detrimental effects of rock'n'roll music on America's impressionable youth. Although it was soon co-opted by capitalistic media conglomerates, rock music remains suspect—in part because of its African roots and its subversive themes.

Last year for example, the Parents' Music Resource Center (PMRC), a group made up primarily of the wives of politicians, attempted to force the record industry to institute a rating system, aimed primarily at censoring lyrics promoting sex, violence, and so-called Satanism. More recently, one Midwestern preacher even burned copies of the theme song from the old television series, *Mr. Ed*, claiming that the tune contained a secretly coded Satanic message.

But rock is also more popular than ever among America's young people. Which may be what inspired Michael Murphey and Joel Soisson to write and produce *Trick or Treat*, a three-million-dollar film based on an idea by Rhet Topham that might just set rock music back about thirty-two years.

Trick or Treat, which was financed by the DeLaurentis Entertainment Group (DEG) takes its cue from the continuing rock music controversy and combines heavy metal rock and horror in an attempt to appeal to fans of both forms. In fact, the film will even feature Gene Simmons of the rock band Kiss, and Ozzy Osbourne (who will also compose a song for the film) as actors.

Inspired by "splatter" films like *Friday the 13th* and *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Trick or Treat* features a dead rock star who comes to horrific life when a frustrated sixteen-year-old plays his last record. The result is a combination rock concert/killing spree that in fact seems to support the critics' contention that rock and roll promotes violence. "But it's strictly tongue-in-cheek," argues producer and coscreenwriter, Joel Soisson. "This is not really an issues-oriented film. We're just having fun at the expense of some critics of rock and roll."

Certainly, Murphey and Soisson's background suggests that they're more accustomed to "fun" films than to controversial ones. They cut their teeth on low-budget features for Republic Entertainment International, for which they produced several films, including *The Supernaturals* (1984), a genre film about time travel starring Maxwell Caulfield. Subsequently, they were hired by Robert Shay of New Line Cinema to line produce the sequel to Wes Craven's *Nightmare on Elm Street*.

FILM PREVIEW TRICK OR TREAT

*A behind-the-screens preview of the new
rock'n'rock horror extravaganza*

by James Verniere

"It's somewhat rare for a sequel to make more money than its predecessor," says Soisson of *Nightmare II*. "But that one did for a couple of reasons. The character of Freddy Krueger, who so captivated the audience in the first film, was brought back and given an expanded role. Second, the film was more like a roller coaster ride than the first one."

Is there a link between fans of so-called "splatter" films and fans of what is often referred to as "headbanger" music produced by groups like Black Sabbath, Blue Oyster Cult, Motley Crue, and Twisted Sister? "Personally, I feel that adolescents have a strong sense of anger, revenge, and fantasy all mixed together. And they are drawn to these fantastic worlds of mythic destruction," says Soisson. "Conan the Barbarian and Freddy Krueger are the purest embodiments of these emotions to audiences of both the music and the movies. We're hoping these audiences will find a little bit of each in Sammi Curr."

Curr is a demonic heavy-metal rock star who communicates with an alienated, adolescent fan (played by *Family Ties* costar Marc Price) through the technique known as "back-masking" (taping messages in reverse that can only be heard when a record is played backward). "Ultimately, we decided to have him jump right out of the stereo and run amuck," adds Soisson.

In addition to its rock star antagonist, *Trick or Treat* is also notable as

the directorial debut of Charles Martin Smith. Smith, who has directed a number of award-winning commercials in Canada, is best known as the actor who played Terry "The Toad" Fields in George Lucas's *American Graffiti* (1973). The actor, who is also a musician, subsequently costarred as one of the Crickets in *The Buddy Holly Story* (1978). And he also starred as the naturalist in the recent film, *Never Cry Wolf* (1983).

"We met with an awful lot of directors," says Soisson. "And most of them came up with approaches that sounded suspiciously like movies we had already seen. We felt that Charles had a new slant on horror films. He was especially interested in the development of the characters and the use of sound effects, which is a vital part of the story."

"I think we all saw the same possibilities in the script," adds Smith. "The film has a kind of humor that's rare in such movies, and we all recognized the importance of character in such films."

Like Soisson, Smith plays down the rock'n'roll/sex and violence link that the PMRC has tried to establish. "We're trying to walk a fine line with this movie. We have a heavy-metal rock star who comes back from the dead to terrorize a town. But we're not trying to suggest that the music is bad or that there is a link with Satanism. In fact, the young hero, who starts out as a slavish follower of the rock group, ends up learning how to



Young Eddle Weinbauer (Mark Price, above) has accidentally conjured up the spirit of Sammi Curr (Tony Fields, above right), who perished in a mysterious demonic ritual (below, right). Now it's up to Eddle to stop Sammi's destructive rampage at a Halloween high school dance.

think for himself. He doesn't decide to stop listening to the music. But he does take control of his own life."

Although Smith lists *The Creature From the Black Lagoon* (1954) and *The Maze* (1953) among his favorite genre films, he was not a big fan of horror or science fiction films as a boy. He's also not presently a fan of "splatter" films, and although he expects *Trick or Treat* to receive either an R or PG-13 rating, he says the violence in the film is not graphic.

A psycho-killer film that's not graphic? Some fans of the genre, especially those who've learned to be skeptical when they hear the name Dino DeLaurentiis, might call that fudging. DeLaurentiis may hope that *Trick Or Treat* becomes as associated with Halloween as the John Carpenter films have become. But until its release, the most we can do is wonder: trick or treat? ■



FALL TV PREVIEW



Christopher Lloyd reunites with Back to the Future director Robert Zemeckis to play a tyrannical teacher in "Go to the Head of the Class."



Polly Holliday (Flo) vents her frustrations at June Lockhart, Ritch Brinkley and Britt Leach at "The Pumpkin Competition," directed by Norman Reynolds.

PHOTOS COPYRIGHT © 1986 UNIVERSAL CITY STUDIOS, INC.

AMAZING STORIES

Burned by the ratings and scorched by the critics, *Amazing Stories* promises great changes this year. The greatest of these will be to lose what Brandon Tartikoff, president of NBC Entertainment, called in an interview with *The New York Times*, its "kiddie orientation." "We skewed a little more silly than we had to," Tartikoff admitted. In an effort to raise ratings by luring in more adults, the focus will be on human comedy next season, which will also make the show fit better with its new companion—*Alf*, a series about a furry alien, that will precede it.

Believe it or not, the staff also plans to tone down the special effects for which Producer Steven Spielberg is famous. Apparently they've learned that glowing machinery just can't fill in the holes in a weak story. As producer David Vogel told the *Times*, "*'Ghost Train'* works wonderfully on a big screen. In theater, you can create magic. On television, when sight and sound are limited, the visual leaps of faith are limited. This year we'll concentrate more strongly on character."

Just when we will see these new, people-featured stories was still uncertain at press time, however. As you probably know, *Amazing Stories* (continued on page 95)



A sinister ringmaster (Prizzi's Honor don William Hickey, left) lures a burned-out reporter into an ominous carnival in "The Circus," a George Romero script directed by Michael Gornick.

Paul Elding is a priest who falls afoul of "Black Widows" in a Darkside episode written by horror author Michael McDowell (Blackwater) and directed by Karl Epstein.

COPYRIGHT © 1986 LAUREL-TV, INC.

TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE

When William Teitler, the supervising producer of *Tales from the Darkside*, says "One of the things we want to continue to do this year are classics," it's more of a fact than a promise. Because this show, backed by a second two-year contract from LBS Syndication, has already got a lot of its shows in the can.

When we went to press, the *Darkside* crews had already filmed twenty-five shows—fifteen in New York and ten in Los Angeles. And according to *Darkside*'s creative consultant, Tom Allen, they had selected almost all of the fifty-plus stories they will be adapting over the next two years.

(continued on page 95)



Playwright Charles Ludlam stars as a dabbler in the occult who gains revenge on his faithless wife (Maria Manuche) in "The Swap."

FALL TV PREVIEW



TWILIGHT ZONE'S SECOND SEASON

Actress Shelley Duvall confronts a strange extraterrestrial object in "A Saucer of Loneliness," (top and left) adapted by David Gerrold from the short story by Theodore Sturgeon.

Akosua Bula plays a college student whose possessions constantly seem to disappear in the Twilight Zone episode titled "Lost and Found."

With its renewal for a second year, enthusiasm is running high at *The Twilight Zone*. "There's a real feeling," says the show's executive story consultant Alan Brennert, "that we're doing something on television that no one else is doing." And yet, compared to last year's high expectations, there is a new note of humility in the air.

For one thing, no one knows exactly how the shift to its new show time will effect the ratings. The hope is that by changing from Friday night at eight, when the dial is ruled by kids who are easily lured to programs aim-

ed at younger audiences, to Saturday night at ten, when adults are in control, they will win the grown-ups and their children, too. But as executive producer Phil DeGuere admits, "Saturday night has been a terrible night for (continued on page 56)"

PHOTOS BY RANDY TEPPER
COPYRIGHT © 1986 CBS ENTERTAINMENT

NEXT STOP THE TWILIGHT ZONE

One writer's odyssey selling a script to the new television program.

Even Heaven and Hell, it's said, have their corporate headquarters, so it seems only faintly ridiculous for me to be sitting, at the moment, in the main editorial offices of *The Twilight Zone*. It certainly looks the part; on one wall is a framed poster advertising an unproduced TV miniseries based on Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End*; next to the couch on which I'm sitting is a huge cage containing a parrot the size and general color of the NBC peacock, and before me on a coffee table are various wind-up toys.

I've been warned about the wind-up toys; if the staff doesn't like the stories you pitch, they're apt to become suddenly quite interested in watching a tiny sushi chef or a pair of plastic shoes meandering across the table. So I've come prepared; I take from my briefcase a small wind-up Godzilla that walks and breathes sparks. This amuses story editors Alan Brennert, Jim Crocker, and Rockne O'Bannon, and Phil DeGuere, the executive producer, a man who bears an unwholesome resemblance to (depending on your age) either Gene Shalit or Jerry Colona, is sufficiently intrigued to leave his desk and play with the two-inch-high monster for a while. I've seen more surreal sights in my years writing television—but not by much.

I've managed to wrangle a pitch session at *Twilight Zone* primarily because I've known Alan for a few years—we share a background in science fiction and the Clarion writers' workshops—and because the show is actively soliciting stories from "new" writers. Though I've supported myself as a writer for a decade, my TV work has mostly been for children's shows. I'm a little nervous. I want to go the distance on this one.

This stage is, according to most writers in Los Angeles, the hardest part of selling something to TV. "The Pitch": sitting in an office with sweat filling your shoes, telling a story to an impassive story editor or producer. According to the Writer's Guild rules, if they ask you to put something on paper, they've bought it. So you have



PHOTO BY MARC SCOTT ZIOREE

by Michael Reaves

to verbally convince them to buy it—sell it, like a used-car dealer or a sideshow Barker. My reward for this is more money than I can comfortably lift if it's converted to quarters—assuming I can do an end run all the way to produced teleplay. The financial motivation is high.

Equally high is a more abstract motivation—the desire to tell a good story. And *Twilight Zone* is one of the few places left in series TV—maybe the only place left—where that's possible, because it's an anthology show. It's even, oftentimes, a good anthology show. Not all the stories hit the mark, by any means—but when was the last time you got to see something like "Her Pilgrim Soul" or "Nightcrawlers" on TV?

This is my chance to create people from scratch, instead of just putting words in the mouths of weekly continuing characters. A chance to tell a story with a beginning, middle and end, as opposed to one episode out of twenty-six other clones. My mouth is watering. I have three stories lined up, all of which I would love to see produced and aired on national TV. I take a deep breath and start my spiel.

Everyone listens politely. When

I've finished—mentally exhausted, and maybe five pounds of water weight lighter—one story has held their interest all the way through: a love story about a lady disc jockey who plays a record by an obscure rock musician of the Sixties, and, by playing it, brings his ghost back from the dead. The story is called "Nightsong." Much discussion and hemming and hawing ensues, while I try to remember the gist of those stress-reduction tapes I bought in 1978. At last a decision is reached—it's a sale. I am to write an outline.

I leave the studio considerably more cheerful than I came in; however, there are still a lot of obstacles between this stage and a produced script. I could turn in an unsatisfactory story to the staff and get cut off. If it gets past them, CBS might reject it for any of a thousand unfathomable reasons of their own. ("We can't buy this—it's *Wednesday*.") And even if it goes to teleplay—well, the ratio of produced scripts to bought scripts over the first season is about two to one.

Despite all this, the chances look good. For one thing, it's a small, intimate story—not a lot of expensive special effects or locations to shoot—and for another, it's a *people* story. I head for home hot to hit the word processor and produce a masterpiece.

Writing the outline is not easy. I've become accustomed to certain styles of storytelling very quickly, and in that area of television that *Variety* cleverly refers to as "kidvid," I've lived by one axiom: "When in doubt, blow it up." I've spent almost ten years writing animated action-adventure extravaganzas where more than three lines of dialogue in a row is a hanging offense. I'm intuitively aware that approach won't work here.

A week later, I finish the outline and hand it in. Now it's in "turn-around," a period of time usually measured in geological epochs, wherein the staff evaluates and deliberates its fate and mine. I turn my attention to other projects, aware that it might be

(continued on page 94)

SECOND SEASON

television as long as I can remember. This year, for the first time, all three networks are programming the entire night, as opposed to putting on movies or specials. We know, of course, that there's more competition from video rentals. But it's our hope that people watching program television will enjoy having some choices. And that we'll be one of them, obviously."

The staff is also admitting to some clinkers. "Last season, we did some shows that were really good, some that were really bad, and some that were middle of the road," confides Rockne O'Bannon, who's now story consultant on the show. And the best that Alan Brennert can say of a hacked-up-version of "The Healer," is "It's still awful, but at least there's less of it."

Still, the minute the staff begins talking about the new shows, the old excitement returns. As we went to press three segments were finished, two of them boasting teleplays by writers we've published in this magazine. The first is Theodore Sturgeon's short story "A Saucer of Loneliness," adapted by David Gerrold, whose "Shaggy Dog Story" appeared in our June '86 issue. The second is Phyllis Eisenstein's "Lost and Found," adapted by TZ alumnus George R. R. Martin, who is now a story editor on the show.

The piece O'Bannon said he was most excited about, however, is the "Once and Future King." With a teleplay by George R. R. Martin based on a story by Bryce Maritano, it's what O'Bannon calls "a nasty little story" about an Elvis Presley impersonator who goes back in time.

Alan Brennert shares O'Bannon's excitement. "Once the staff starts working on a script," he explains, "everyone's enthusiasm feeds on everyone else's. For example, I just finished a script called 'Voices in the Earth,' set on Earth one hundred years in the future. And when I was talking to Brad May [who's returned to direct TZ's photography] I couldn't help saying: 'Hey, you're going to be able to go to town on this. The atmosphere is poisonous, the light is yellow, and the special effects people are coming up with all kinds of ways to envision it.'

Phil DeGuere speculates that there

may also be "a change in the overall tone of the show. It's not something specific," he insists. "It's not a directive that CBS has given to us or that I have given the writers. It just happens naturally... When you're working at eight, you tend to gear your thinking almost subconsciously to what you imagine to be the eight o'clock audience. So now, with the ten o'clock audience, we are thinking in terms of more controversial, more adult, more challenging kinds of material, and less of stories that include, for instance, families with children or stories about children."



Profile: Alan Brennert author of *Her Pilgrim Soul*

This issue of The Twilight Zone begins a new feature: scripts from episodes of the new Twilight Zone television program. In the interview that follows, Alan Brennert talks about how he came to write "Her Pilgrim Soul":

After serving as the story editor for *Buck Rogers* in 1979, Alan Brennert recalls, "It was such a ghastly, horrendous experience that I vowed never to take a staff position again." And for the next six years he was good to his word. He worked diligently as a free-lancer, turning in more than thirty scripts for

And while DeGuere admits that he doesn't share Rod Serling's passion for trying to promote social awareness through television, he is committed to resisting what he calls "the operating philosophy of television"—the idea that you have to "spoon up the same predigested stuff week after week after week." "What does *Twilight Zone* offer but the opportunity to be astounded and to be surprised and to get a chill up and down the spine? And that," he contends, "is really the opposite of offering the same thing every week."

—Robin Bromley

such shows as *Darkroom*, *The Mississippi*, and *Simon & Simon*, and turning down several story editor jobs.

But when Jim Crocker, TZ's former supervising producer, called to say that Phil DeGuere was doing *Twilight Zone*, Brennert remembers "hanging up the phone and jumping up and down, screaming, 'Yaaaaay!' because *Twilight Zone* had always been one of my favorite shows. And for years, when people asked me, 'What would you like to do?' I always said, 'Well, something like *Twilight Zone*—a fantasy anthology series.'"

Now, more than eleven scripts and three years as the show's executive story consultant later, Brennert's enthusiasm has hardly diminished. As he put it, "The extraordinary thing about the show, in general, but *Her Pilgrim Soul*, in particular, is that the kind of objections you'd typically get on television didn't occur on this story. There was no one from the network saying, 'Hey, you've got a character talking about poetry for five minutes here,' or more to the point, two characters talking for forty minutes... And Phil is terrific. He lets the writer have as much input on the production level as the writer wants. I've sat in on casting, been in rehearsal, special effects sessions, dubbing, and on one episode, even redesigned the wardrobe."

For "Her Pilgrim Soul," he even adds working on the music with William Goldstein to that list. But working in the editing room with Jim Crocker is where it all came together.

Brennert elaborates: "I should explain that there are some scenes in the script that aren't in the show. But every one of those cuts was approved by me. That's the pleasure of being involved in the editing process. As a writer, you see what works and what doesn't."

And in the end, he says, "I was one hundred percent pleased with 'Her Pilgrim Soul.' It came out exactly as I envisioned it. That was my baby." —RB



HER PILGRIM SOUL

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER:

Phillip DeGuere

SUPERVISING PRODUCER:

James Crocker

PRODUCER:

Harvey Frand

by ALAN BRENNERT

CAST

Kevin Drayton Kristoffer Tabori
Nola Granville Anne Twomey
Daniel Gaddis Gary Cole
Carol Drayton Wendy Girard
Nola (age 10) Danica McKellar
Nola (age 5) Betsy Jane Licon
Ruskin Nelson Welch
Susan Katherine Welch

1. THE TWILIGHT ZONE STARFIELD

Stars twinkle against blackness. Suddenly the background shifts from black to powder blue; the stars, from white to deep blue. We're now looking at a starfield created by computer-generated-vector (as opposed to raster-) graphics. We start zooming through the field, stars racing by, past dark blue spheres (three-dimensionalized line drawings) representing the planets of our solar system. Pluto, Neptune, Saturn, Mars, all race past until we're zooming in on a vector-image of Earth...latitude and longitude lines visible, the outline of continents sketched in...rushing in like a soul plummeting to Earth. Titles over the above; as we near Earth:

DANIEL'S VOICE

Beautiful. Just beautiful.
Suddenly, the face of a man—young, bearded, a bit chubby—appears behind the images we're watching, looming like something of Gulliver like proportions.

2. COMPUTER LAB NEW ANGLE DAY#1

The images we've just seen have been appearing in a holographic display—a column of soft, shimmering blue light rising from a pedestal at the center of the room. The bearded young man, a lab assistant named Daniel Gaddis, moves out from behind the holo display to a console nearby; he taps a few keys on a keyboard, and the planets disappear from the display, replaced by other, random geometric forms.

FADE IN:

DANIEL

Doc, you're a genius. This thing is light years beyond any holographic imaging system in existence.
(Note: Supered over, in digital lettering at upper left corner of the frame: DAY ONE.)

3. ANGLE TO INCLUDE KEVIN DRAYTON

A lanky thirty-year-old computer scientist in a white lab smock. He sits at a table nearby, poring over papers, stabbing at his calculator, totally self-absorbed. He does not respond to what Daniel's said.

DANIEL

The guys from Corporate are gonna canonize you. How about a drink after work to celebrate?

(no response)

Doctor Drayton?

Kevin finally hears, glances up, a distracted look in his eyes.

KEVIN

I'm sorry, Dan, I wasn't listening.

DANIEL

(under his breath)

Yeah, what else is new.

KEVIN

What?

DANIEL

Nothing. I was just saying, the astro-gation program checks out all—
Seeing something in the holo display behind Daniel, Kevin's eyes go wide; he stands slowly, interrupting:

KEVIN

Uh... Daniel? What is that supposed to be?

4. IN THE HOLO DISPLAY

Floating there about three feet off the ground, suspended in a halo of blue light, is what appears to be ... a human fetus, rocking gently in some invisible womb. Not the sketchy vector graphics we saw earlier, but a full, seemingly solid image. Now, behind that image, we see Kevin and Daniel's seemingly huge faces come into frame, aghast and astonished by what they're seeing.

DANIEL

It looks like a ... human fetus. Pretty far along, too ... eight, maybe nine months ...

KEVIN

(irritably)

I can see that! What the hell is it doing in my hologram display?

DANIEL

I don't understand ... it's not part of any program we're using currently ... Daniel's face disappears as he moves out of frame.

5. BACK TO SCENE

Daniel is frantically adjusting controls at the console, while Kevin circles the display, impatiently, still horrified at the anomaly he's looking at.

DANIEL

(as he works)

This is crazy. All the error-correcting codes are running, I ran all the debug routines this morning—

KEVIN

Well, run them again!

DANIEL

I am! The damn thing shouldn't be there!

Impatiently Kevin shoulders aside Daniel and starts working the console himself. Daniel is too baffled to be annoyed; he stares, with growing fascination, at the fetus-image. Kevin works the control, his expression tense, anxious; he looks up every few seconds, frowning at the anomaly which refuses to go away. Finally he stops, stares at the display, his mouth set in a tight line. Several tense beats ... then, still staring at the display:

KEVIN

(quietly)

We're going to have to clear the memory. Power it down, reload the system.

DANIEL

(aghast)

A cold reset? It'll take all day to bring it back up again!

KEVIN

You have a better suggestion?

Daniel sighs, goes to another console as Kevin flips off the holograph display; the column of blue light disappears, and with it the fetus.

As Daniel starts flipping controls, readouts throughout the room start winking off; we hear, perhaps, the hum of systems beginning to wind down as power is shut off; and we:

TIME CUT TO

6. GLOBAL TECHNOLOGIES BUILDING NIGHT (OF DAY #1)

7. COMPUTER LAB NIGHT ANGLE ON WORK TABLE

Styrofoam coffee cups lie in dead-soldier fashion on the table; next to them, crumpled bags from a fast-food franchise, a half-eaten hamburger on a paper plate. We pan from these to Kevin and Daniel, going over manuals and notebooks at the table; all around them the computers stand mute, all power shut off, no readouts visible. Kevin stands, stifles a yawn.

KEVIN

Okay, we're back up again. Let's just check in once, then call it a night. Daniel nods gratefully. The two men go to separate consoles, start flipping on controls; immediately there is a power surge and the computers hum into life again.



readouts winking on. Several beats ... then Kevin goes to the holography console, flips it on—

8. ANGLE ON THE HOLO DISPLAY

It snaps on—and the fetus reappears.

9. BACK TO SCENE

Kevin's eyes are saucers. Daniel suddenly looks about five years older. They stare at the fetus ... then glance at each other with the look of shipwreck survivors who have just discovered that the boat they saw in the distance is just a passing porpoise. They look back at the fetus. Then back to one another. A long beat, then:

DANIEL

What now?

A beat ... and then Kevin turns, heads for the coat rack on which his overcoat is hung.

KEVIN

Now we get some sleep. Whatever it is, I have the sinking feeling it's still going to be here in the morning. We'll worry about it then.

Kevin shrugs on his coat as Daniel draws closer to the display, fascinated. After a beat:

DANIEL

Doc ... you know, it almost seems ... alive ...

Kevin flips a switch on the console; the display snaps off.

KEVIN

Come on, Dan. Don't get weird on me.

It's just a glitch in the system. Daniel nods, still uncertain. He shrugs on his own coat as Kevin flips off the lights; they exit. A beat, then the halo display suddenly snaps on by itself ... and in it now is not a fetus, but an infant ... a squalling, squirming, newborn baby.

CUT TO

10. INTERIOR DRAYTON BEDROOM NIGHT (OF DAY #1)

Kevin sits in bed, hunched over as though bracing for an attack, sheets partially covering him. His wife, Carol, an attractive brunette in her late twenties, sits propped up against a pillow beside him, also discreetly covered. There's a palpable tension between them, one which, we suspect, has been there for quite some time.

KEVIN

Look. I really don't think this is the right time to talk about it, okay?

CAROL

I've been hearing that for four years, Kevin. You knew when we got married that I wanted children someday.

A beat, as Kevin seems to draw into himself even more; then:

KEVIN

Carol, I just don't ... feel ready. There's still too much to do at the lab, and ...

CAROL

(suddenly angry)

To hell with the lab. You spend all your time in the lab. I barely even see you anymore, I am sick to death of hearing about the damn lab!

KEVIN

It's three years of my life! I can't just throw that away, can I?

CAROL

(reasonably)

You've got four years invested in our marriage. You can't throw that away, either, can you?

KEVIN

(beat; then)

No ... no, of course not ...

Carol leans forward, puts a hand to his back, gently stroking it.

CAROL

(softer)

Kev, what is it. What's bothering you?

KEVIN

I've just been under a lot of pressure to get the project done. That's all.

CAROL

(calmly; gently)

Kevin—please. It's not the work.

You've been under job pressure before and things have never been this bad between us. What's wrong?

Kevin averts his gaze; he knows what she's saying is true, but he can barely acknowledge it, much less explain it. A beat ... and then he stands, grabbing up a pillow and a blanket.

KEVIN

I'm sorry. I just can't handle this right now. I've got to be alone for a while ... I'll sleep in the den; just for tonight, okay?

He starts out of the room, pauses, looks at her as though to say something ... then, unable to figure out what to say, he turns, frustration and anxiety in his face, and exits.

We hold on Carol Drayton's look of bafflement and concern, as she watches her husband drifting a little bit further out of reach ...

CUT TO

11. EXTERIOR HIGHWAY DAY#2 SUPERED OVER: DAY TWO

A sign identifies it as STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS—ROUTE 128—AMERICA'S HIGH TECHNOLOGY HIGHWAY.

12. INTERIOR GLOBAL TECHNOLOGIES CORRIDOR

An abstracted Kevin approaches the door to his lab, to the right of which is a palm-print activated security lock marked SECURED PERSONNEL ONLY. Kevin starts to raise his hand to the lock ... then becomes aware of sounds coming from within the lab. Sounds very much like ... the muted cries of a small child. Alarmed, Kevin presses his palm against the lock; there's a burst of light as the mechanism scans his palm print, and the door slides open.

13. INTERIOR COMPUTER LAB

Kevin hurries in to find the holo display activated ... and at the center of the column of blue light sits—a little girl. About five years old, and as real and solid-looking as Kevin himself, albeit tinged in the same bluish tones as everything in the display; she's hunched over, hugging her knees, sobbing. Kevin stops dead in his tracks, flabbergasted. Please note: a major transformation occurs in him here; his ordered, organized world in one moment been turned inside-out; he is astonished, amazed, baffled by what he sees; and as he slowly approaches the girl in the hologram, he is no longer the confident and in-control scientist, but confused and uncertain. He squats down beside her and passes a hand, tentatively, through her image; though she may look solid, she is definitely a holographic image. But her tears seem very real indeed, and Kevin finds himself saying, gently:

KEVIN

Hey. What's the matter? Hmm?
The girl—whom we shall call Nola—looks up, her eyes big with fear and accusation. Between sobs:

NOLA

They left me here. All night. All alone.

She continues crying; Kevin's heart goes out to her. He raises a hand, instinctively, to comfort her, but it, of course, passes right through her arm.

KEVIN

Hey ... c'mon. It's okay. Somebody's here now ...

But this fails to comfort or quiet her. Kevin looks completely at sea; he doesn't know who or what this apparition is, much less how to stop her crying. He looks around, desperately ... then his eyes light up with sudden inspiration.

KEVIN

Hold on. I think I've got an idea. Stay right—

(realizing)

—uh ... well ... just stay put, okay?
He hurries to the holograph console, starts punching in coordinates.

14. ON KEVIN

His hands fly across the keyboard. On a small video screen above the keyboard, we see various vector-imaged geometrical shapes taking form—a sphere, a cube, a funnel. Intercut with:

15. THE HOLO DISPLAY

As a corresponding sphere, cube, and funnel appear in the column of blue light above the little girl, Kevin works the keyboard ... and the objects start a little dance, as though being juggled by some invisible hand. Nola looks up ... sees this ... and stops crying. She sniffs back tears, fascinated ... then breaks out into a smile and a laugh. She slaps her hands together, squealing with delight; Kevin smiles, enjoying himself. She takes a jump up, trying to catch one of the objects; she succeeds in hitting the cone a glancing blow, making it spin even as Kevin manipulates it. Then Kevin touches a series of buttons ... and the sphere drops down, bouncing on the floor of the display unit. Nola takes it, starts bouncing it up and down delightedly, her fear and loneliness forgotten. Kevin makes the cube and funnel disappear, as:

16. NEW ANGLE

Daniel enters the room ... and does a take when he sees what's going on. Like a man underwater, never taking his gaze off the little girl in the display, he makes his way to Kevin at the console.

DANIEL

You, uh, still think this is just some glitch in the system?

KEVIN

(shakes head)

When I programmed that ball she behaved like any normal child her age. No program in the world can mimic spontaneous reaction to unexpected stimuli.

(beat)

That tells us what she isn't, but I still don't have the vaguest idea who or what she is.

DANIEL

(beat; then)

Well ... we could try asking her.
They approach the girl, squatting as she

continues to play with the toy.

KEVIN

(after a beat; uncertainly)

You ... like the ball?

NOLA

(happily)

Yeah. Thanks, mister.

KEVIN

The name is Kevin. How about you?

NOLA

Nola.

DANIEL

You have a last name, honey?

Nola's face screws up in concentration as she tries to get the big word right. A beat, then:

NOLA

Granville.

DANIEL

Nola Granville. Pretty name. Where do you live, Nola?

NOLA

(thinks; then)

I useta live in ... Westchester. Even Kevin has to smile at that.

KEVIN

You mean Westchester? In New York?

NOLA

Yeah. In a big green house 'cross the way from the sprained lake.

KEVIN

The what?

DANIEL

(laughs)

Grassy Sprain Lake. It's a big reservoir in upper Yonkers ... near Hastings-on-Hudson.

KEVIN

What are you doing in here, Nola? Nola just looks at him, guilelessly, a trace of confusion and fear in her eyes and in her tone.

NOLA

Isn't ... isn't this where I'm s'posed to be?
She looks as though she might start crying again. Daniel tries to head it off, quickly.

DANIEL

Yeah ... sure. Of course it is, Nola. You're ... you're home.
Nola looks relieved. Off Kevin's look of discomfiture:

CUT TO

17. EXTERIOR GLOBAL TECHNOLOGIES NIGHT (OF DAY #2)

18. INTERIOR COMPUTER LAB NIGHT FAVORING NOLA

No longer a five-year-old girl ... but a ten-year-old. She sits cross-legged in the display, very thoughtful, staring into space with the daydreamy look of a small child. We pan from her to another corner of the lab, where Kevin watches her with mounting fascination; the door slides open, then, and Daniel enters, a notebook in hand.

KEVIN

(low tones; to Daniel)

Incredible. She seems to be aging at a rate of about ... five months every hour. Ten years per day.
(beat)

You turn up anything on the house she described?

DANIEL

There's a Granville family living in that area ... the house has been in the family since the turn of the century. They don't have a little girl named Nola ... but the woman I talked to *did* recall a great aunt of hers by that name ... Kind of a black sheep, the family never talked much about her.

KEVIN

Do they know where she is?

DANIEL

(beat; then)

She died. Quite a while back, apparently; no one knew the exact date. A beat as Kevin reacts to this, looking at Nola with a new perspective; he gestures to Daniel to follow him and approaches the little girl, still cross-legged in the display, staring into space. When she sees Kevin, her eyes light up, the daydreams forgotten, and she breaks into a wide smile.

NOLA

Hi, Kevin. Kevin returns the smile, a bit of the protective shell around him starting to melt just a little.

KEVIN

Hi Nola.

(awkward beat)

You, uh, want me to take you another ball? Some new toys?

NOLA

That's okay. I don't need any.

DANIEL

Don't you get kind of ... bored, Nola?

NOLA

(shrugs)

When I get bored, I just ... go somewhere else.

Kevin and Daniel react.

KEVIN

What do you mean, 'go somewhere else'?

NOLA

In my head. Like just now, I was out by the sprained lake. Remembering the time Daddy took us out for a picnic, and I walked into the water up to my knees, and Daddy ...

(face clouds over)

... Daddy paddled me. Hard.

(half-beat)

I didn't want to remember that part.

KEVIN

So you think about places ... people ... things ... and it's like you're almost there?

NOLA

Yeah. But I like being here, with you, better.

She smiles shyly at him. Kevin can't help but smile back.

DANIEL

Nola ... you remember when it was your Daddy took you to the lake? What year?

NOLA

(concentrating)

I think it was ... nineteen and—seventeen. Or maybe sixteen. Yeah. Nineteen and sixteen.

Off Kevin's and Daniel's reactions:

CUT TO

KEVIN

One of my favorites. Did your father like it?

NOLA

(glumly)

He didn't let me finish. Took the book away from me, and ...

(quietly)

... tossed it into the fire.

(a beat)

'It's not a girl's place,' he'd say, 'to think about such things,' and when I'd ask questions ... about politics, literature ... he'd just smile a patronizing little smile, and tell me how beautiful I was. Sometimes I wished I was plain as a doormat ... anything so I'd be treated as though I had half a brain! She shifts position, restlessly, leans forward and smiles.

NOLA

But you must be bored silly by me and my stories. What about you? What's your life like? Tell me everything.

KEVIN

(evasive)

Nothing much to tell, really. About your parents—

NOLA

(ignoring)

Are you married, Kevin?

KEVIN

Uh ... yes. Yes, I am.

Nola's face falls.

NOLA

(disappointed)

Oh.

(then quickly)

What's her name?

KEVIN

(hesitantly)

Carol.

(tries again to change subject)

So how old were you when you—

NOLA

What's she like? Is she smart? She'd have to be, I bet, for you to marry her.

KEVIN

(loosening up a bit)

Yes ... she's very smart. We met in a night class, five years ago.

(remembering)

She just sat down next to me one night and started talking. Inside of a few minutes we were chatting away like old friends. Inside of a week, I was in love. I never thought it would happen to me that quickly. I—

(catching himself;

drawing back)

Well. Anyway. Yes, she's a very ... bright lady.

Nola tries to hide her disappointment, but it's all too apparent in her tone and her face; Kevin is touched by her schoolgirl crush on him, wishes he could say or do something to get closer to her; but before he can, Nola says, with genuine feeling:

NOLA

That's ... that's nice. I'm happy for you, Kevin.

(a beat; wistfully)

She must be a very lucky girl.

CUT TO

(continued on page 90)

19. INTERIOR ANOTHER PART OF THE LAB NIGHT

Kevin and Daniel sit in a room adjacent to the main computer lab, Nola clearly visible in the doorway behind them; every so often Kevin glances back toward her, his glance partly scientific curiosity, and partly paternal.

DANIEL

She's totally aware of her surroundings ... of her form ... and she seems perfectly comfortable with them.

KEVIN

Well, remember; despite her memories of a ... previous existence, she's spent all her life, subjectively, in that hologram.

DANIEL

(glancing back)

Cute little kid. The way her face screws up when she's trying to remember something ... seems like the older she gets, the more memories she has to draw upon.

KEVIN

Yeah, but memories from *what*?

DANIEL

(beat, then)

Look, I know this is going to sound pretty bizarre, but—

(another beat)

Do you suppose that somehow ... in some way ... a human soul has been ... reincarnated ... inside that computer?

Off Kevin's reaction:

CUT TO

20. EXTERIOR HIGHWAY ROUTE 128 SUPERED OVER: DAY THREE

21. INTERIOR COMPUTER LAB FAVORING NOLA DAY

Now a very beautiful sixteen-year-old. She sits, cross-legged, in holo display, as opposite her Kevin sits on the edge of a cot he's had set up in the lab. Nola's gaze is faraway distant, as she summons up memories for Kevin:

NOLA

... I remember this one time, Daddy got hold of a book of poetry I was reading ... William Butler Yeats? In one poem, Yeats uses the dread word, *copulate*, and Daddy ... well, Daddy was neither amused nor enlightened. I tried reading him the one that begins, 'I will arise and go on now, and go to Innisfree / And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made—'

KEVIN

(smiles; finishes)

'Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for a honey-bee / And live alone in the bee-loud glade.'

(beat)

'And I shall have some peace there ...'

NOLA

(delighted)

You know Yeats?

HOTEL HUNTING

*Some come to find romance, some to
find pleasure, and some for a far more
dangerous game.*

by Charles Sheffield

ILLUSTRATION BY TREVOR IRVIN

San Francisco and New York are easy. So are Paris and Rome. Dublin is impossible, and I don't even try there any more. But London ...

Ah. There's the challenge.

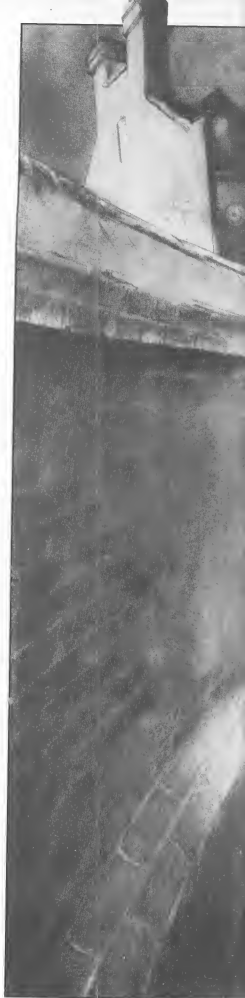
It was all so different just ten years ago. In those days, London was the easiest of all. I would take a taxi in mid-afternoon from the center of the city to one of the hotels that circle Heathrow Airport—my favorite was the Skyway, because that's where everyone stranded overnight on their way from the Middle East to the United States was lodged. There, in the half-hour between five-thirty and six, two hundred travelers would check in. Most of them didn't know their way around London. They would be stuck in the hotel for the evening, with free food and accommodation provided by the airlines.

It took most people a couple of

hours to realize that they had a free night, a blank spot in their life. They were *in transit*, a condition that arouses sympathy, but not suspicion. No need to tell wives, husbands, or anyone else what they were doing. "Stranded overnight at Heathrow" was sufficient.

Contact was easy. All it called for—like everything else in this life—was timing. I would sit in the lobby and watch until one of my choices (unaccompanied, between twenty-five and forty) went into dinner. When the restaurant was half-full, so that it was impossible to give strangers separate tables, I went in myself. Two pounds to the head-waiter (ah, yes—a pound was more in those distant days) was enough to assure me the seat I wanted. After that, it was usually easy.

I have no doubt that the Skyway Hotel is still doing a flourishing





business in transit passengers, and that there is no shortage of unattached travelers.

But other things have changed. I am a man of perhaps more than usual sensitivity, and certain prospects are intolerable to me. The thought of the old social diseases was repugnant, but they at least were easy to diagnose, treat, and cure.

Herpes and AIDS are different. One is a life sentence, the other a death sentence. I want nothing to do with either.

(As evidence that I do not demand standards of others that I will not apply to myself, I should add that I would never approach a woman were there the slightest chance that I were sick. This applies not only to the diseases I have mentioned, but even to such ailments as influenza. I cannot say positively that no woman ever came to harm as a result of a liaison with me, since I hold, and have always held, that it is the female's responsibility to assure that she does not become pregnant. However, despite the *dicta* of the United States Government, pregnancy is a condition. It is not a disease.)

Enough. The problem was clear. By 1980, transit passengers could no longer be considered as safe partners. It took me a little while to find a new solution.

The answer lies in the small hotels, like the one I have just left. It happens to be in Montague Street, but that is a fact of no significance. There are hundreds of them, perhaps even thousands, scattered through Bloomsbury and off Bayswater Road and Kensington High Street. A fortunate circumstance, since I, of course, never stay more than once in any.

They ask few questions, these small hotels. Given cash in advance, they require no evidence of identity, or even of nationality. They are remarkably inexpensive—a quarter of the price of the international chains. In consequence, there are naturally some austerities. Based on direct experience of perhaps forty hotels in the class, I can testify as to the nature of these. The hotels lack bars, elevators, telex machines, room service, or restaurants except for the minimal culinary facilities needed to provide the cooked breakfast that is included in the room rate. And there is no television, telephone, or bathroom in each room. But these small inconveniences I regard as irrelevant (I might even argue that the absence of a television is a boon). Other hotel

qualities, the ones that I cherish, more than outweigh any disadvantages.

A brief chronology of the past forty-eight hours will make my point better than any general description. I arrived at the hotel at six o'clock at night, having just flown in from Brussels (that "whited sepulchre of a city," as Conrad aptly puts it, all business, where I personally would never seek amatory pleasure). I had no reservation in London; no idea, indeed, at which hotel I would spend the night. I simply walked through Bloomsbury until an inconspicuous "Vacancies" sign caught my eye on a quiet street.

*It surprised and
amused me to note
that I was not
the only one
playing the game.
At the far side
of the room, a
heavily built
man with a
pouchy face was
performing his
own quiet survey
from behind
The Daily Telegraph.*

The entrance lobby looked wholly satisfactory. There was one main lounge off to the right, with half a dozen couches and a single large television. Beyond it was a booth that held a single pay telephone. The receptionist, behind a glass partition on the left of the lobby, was of indeterminate nationality. He accepted money and a false name from me and handed over a room key and a key to the front door without raising his eyes from the *Daily Express*.

By six fifteen I was in my room. Not, however, to stay there. I changed quickly into corduroys and a loose sweater, and went down to the lounge. A copy of the *Times*, held at eye level, allowed me to inspect each new hotel arrival. About thirty guests

checked in during the next hour and a half. It was not a great evening for prospects, but I identified two possible, and one very probable. During this process it surprised and amused me to note that I was not the only one playing the game. At the far side of the room, a heavily built man with a pouchy face was performing his own quiet survey from behind *The Daily Telegraph*.

He caught my eye, and gave me a half-wink. I smiled back. I knew, and he knew that I knew. That was all right. Live and let live. This was not the first time I had encountered possible competition. It was reassuring to see that his face came alight when a woman well beyond the height and weight limit that I find most attractive signed into the hotel. We would not be fighting over territory.

At eight thirty I went over to examine the guest register. I could identify my three from the order of their arrival: Janet Lindley, of Taunton, Massachusetts (possible); Mary Ward, of Salina, Kansas (first choice); and Damson Walker, of Forth Worth, Texas (possible). I was tempted to cross Miss Walker off the list. In moments of passion I could not see myself saying "Damson, Damson." What sort of parents would name their child after a plum?

Perhaps I should explain my selection procedure, beyond the obvious fact that candidates must be female, attractive, and in the age range already mentioned. The small, inexpensive London hotels are an absolute magnet for a particular genus of *Femina Americana*: namely, the small-town schoolteacher. The typical specimen is in her early thirties. She is working on a thesis, is on her first visit to the British Isles, and passing through London on her way to Stratford (Shakespeare, that myriad-M.A.'d man), the Lake District (Wordsworth, or less often Coleridge), Ayrshire (Burns), or Dublin (James Joyce—*Dubliners* or *Ulysses*, but never *Finnegans Wake*). She must watch her expenditures closely, and as a result she cannot be found at the Grosvenor Park or Claridges. And she would like to have a "romantic" experience in Europe—one that she can perhaps only hint at to the school staff back home, but one which she will carry in her bosom forever.

It is my pleasure to provide such an experience, for she has one other characteristic that appeals above all others. She is always *clean*. The risk of ravaging disease is quite negligible.

(I encountered one lady, from Fredericksburg, Virginia, who was actually a virgin. And is one still, for all I know. I hate mess.)

It would be misleading to suggest that I confine my attention to teachers. My tastes are catholic. I do, of course, have preferences. Other things being equal, my favorite might be the young traveling companion of an older American woman. She endures much during the day, conveying her elderly cargo and source of funds around the sights of London, and when unleashed in the early evening, there is often a desperate pent-up energy in her. Some of my happiest memories are of Marion, a young lady from Boston who did her best to destroy me totally between nine p.m. (Angela's bedtime cup of hot milk) and seven a.m. (Angela's morning coffee, no milk, and two spoons of sugar). However, Marion was a rare dish. In terms of supply, the small London hotels provide ten times as many schoolteachers as all other candidates combined.

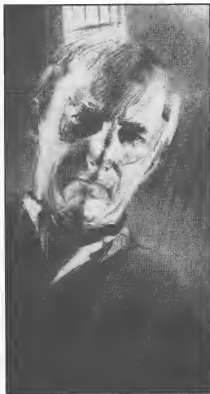
My next remark may sound improbable, but I believe that I can pick out those prospects from the hotel register on the basis of handwriting alone. The script is always neat and legible, with dots on i's and crosses on t's, totally different from the wretched scrawl of regional government employees and Italian students, trying to squeeze a few pounds out of their inadequate *per diem*. My pouchy-eyed friend was also identifiable with fair certainty. He would be "John Simpson, 37, Victoria Road, Birmingham." A good, neutral name, with a big-city address. I noted it for possible future use.

I must curb my tendency to digress. Although volumes could be written on the endless variety found within a superficially homogeneous class of women, I will not be the one to write them. Only fools kiss and tell; besides which, I have advanced only as far as eight thirty on the evening of my arrival.

In point of fact, the rest of the evening may sound like an anticlimax. Since the hotel did not serve dinner, there was no suitable opportunity to meet Janet Lindley, Mary Ward, or even Damson Walker. I therefore walked over to Little Russel Street and enjoyed a pleasant if undemanding pub meal at The Plough.

By ten-fifteen I was back at the hotel, ready for a long sleep. If things went according to plan, I would have little rest the following night. In the hotel lobby I took another look at the guest register, on the off-chance that

other prospects had arrived late. There were no interesting additions. The lounge on the other side of the hall was deserted but for one man, hiding behind *The Telegraph*. I assumed it must be my friend "John Simpson," but as I walked on toward the stairs the newspaper was lowered a few inches. The upper half of a stranger's face was revealed. It was thin and swarthy, with bright black eyes and lank hair. From the ferret face and dark complexion, the fellow could have been the brother of the man on duty at registration. He gave me a hard, evaluative inspection, then the newspaper rose back into position. I



noticed that the backs of his hands were covered with golden hair, oddly at variance with his skin coloring.

Back in my room, I undressed, cleaned my teeth, climbed into bed, and turned out the light. And it was at that moment, as my eyes closed, that I received the first hint of something very different about this hotel.

The washbasin in my room suddenly began an unpleasant gurgling noise, as though something was welling up through the outflow pipe and then slowly draining away again.

For a few minutes I did my best to ignore it. I was fairly sure I knew the cause. Most of the small London hotels were formerly Victorian rowhouse residences. In converting

them to hotels, several contiguous houses are often squeezed together, and drastic changes must be made to the plumbing and heating systems. That has some odd consequences. I have stayed in rooms where water pressure appeared to be a random variable. Sometimes it came gushing from the faucets hard enough to splash the opposite walls, and the next moment it diminished to a miserable trickle.

The drainage systems are equally idiosyncratic. Almost certainly, someone in a room above mine was filling their washbasin with water, then allowing it to drain out. During the latter process, my washbasin was serving as a temporary reservoir.

I endured it for perhaps ten minutes, then switched on the light and got out of bed. It was not at all clear what I could do, since there was no telephone in my room and anyway I could not fairly make a complaint. Whoever was above me had a right to wash.

I went across to the washbasin and looked down into it. As I did so, there was a final swirl of frothy fluid disappearing into the waste pipe. It had a strongly pinkish tinge, but before I could look more closely it was gone. I leaned forward and examined the sides of the basin. The bottom four inches or so were glistening in the overhead light, as though they had been thinly coated with a light oil. I fancied that the basin wall there was also a slightly different color from the rest.

I stood for a few minutes, waiting, but the activity on the floor above seemed to be over. There were no more gurglings, no more liquids. Finally, I ran hot water into the basin, went back to bed, and fell asleep within a few minutes.

The next morning I was too busy to brood over a gurgling washbasin. Breakfast was served from seven-thirty to nine-thirty, and by seven-twenty I was standing in the hotel lobby. I was wearing a woolen shirt, tweed sports jacket, and well-worn flannel pants, and I was staring at a London street-guide. Mary Ward came down for breakfast at ten minutes to eight.

That piece of good fortune simplified things for me. She was my preferred choice, but had Damson Walker or Janet Lindley, my other prospects, arrived first I would have faced a difficult decision. Act now, or wait and hope that Mary Ward would breakfast later? There is a melancholy truth to the cliché that one cannot

marry all the girls.

As she headed for the dining room entrance I lifted my eyes from the map and gave her a casual glance. Then I moved directly into her path.

"Excuse me," I said. "But aren't you Ellen Williams?"

She gave me a cool look—wary, but not unfriendly. "No, I'm not. I've never heard of her."

I stepped aside. "Oh, I'm really sorry. I thought for a minute..." Then, when I had already turned to face away from her: "I'm sorry, you look just like a friend of my sister's from Salina, Kansas."

"But I'm from Salina, Kansas!"

The power of small-town bonding. She didn't quite reach out to grab my sleeve, but she did move around so that she could look into my face.

"Really?" I stared at her hard. "And you don't know Ellen? That's quite incredible—you're almost like twins. Actually, though, you're not. I can see now that she's quite a few years older than you."

I had not stopped walking, so we had eased through the dining room entrance. The middle-aged lady who ran the place made an obvious assumption and led us to a table for two. Stage One was complete.

Stage Two was easy. It always is. Few people can resist the command, "Tell me about yourself." I did not couch it in those terms, but I made sure that I asked Mary Ward many questions as we ate breakfast, while I initially said next to nothing about my own background. By the time we were drinking a second cup of coffee, I had decided who I was.

Trial and error have taught me that there are only two safe guises. You can be a businessman (with a day to kill between appointments, hence the casual dress); or you can be a writer. Any other pose may imply specialized knowledge that I do not have, but which a companion may unfortunately possess. Over the years I have learned to avoid being a doctor, diplomat, musician (even if one is not, as I am, tone-deaf), antique dealer, or college professor. Most of all I avoid the role of wine importer. (Why? Because I am one.)

With schoolteachers, it is best to be a writer. Teachers admire the creative talent, and from a writer they accept (perhaps even expect) unusually forward behavior. Being a writer also answers in principle another awkward question. I say in principle, because oddly enough no one has ever asked me, "If you're the success you seem to

be, why are you staying in this cheap hotel?" My answer would be, "The rewards of the artist are many, but they are seldom financial."

Mary Ward proved to be a truly delightful person. She was a strawberry blonde, with unusually dark eyes, lovely teeth, a direct look and manner, and a terrific sense of humor. When she laughed, she tilted her head to one side and squinted at me through narrowed eyes. It was a mystery why she was still unmarried. I fell in love with her in the first twenty minutes. She taught high school in Salina (English and Physical Education, which explained the firm body and healthy look) and was in London for her master's thesis on Samuel Johnson. Before breakfast was over,

The ferret-faced man sat alone at the table. He did not eat or drink, but simply sat, eyeing everyone in the dining room. Yet I knew, as one always knows, that I was the target of his interest.

we had agreed that when my publishing appointment was over we would go together to visit the Cheshire Cheese, and then have lunch.

We lingered over coffee, so as we left the dining area I had the chance of a second look at both Janet and Damson and confirmed my first impression. They were nice looking, but Mary was the prize. Janet had a frowning morning face, and I could hear Damson drinking coffee from the other side of the room. Small defects, true, but ones that I was happy to do without.

There were two other odd elements to breakfast. First, John Simpson failed to put in an appearance. That surprised me very much, for I felt sure that I had not misread him and his motives in staying at this hotel. And a third ferret-face came into the dining room and

sat alone at a table, there from the time we entered until after we left. A casual observer would have mistaken him for the man I had seen the previous night, but on these occasions I am never casual. I look carefully at everything. He was over to my right-hand side, so I could not see him without turning round; but I watched him. He did not eat or drink, but simply sat eyeing everyone in the dining room. I say "everyone"; and yet I knew, as one always knows, that I was the target of interest. He was watching me.

It was certainly disconcerting. Perhaps the ferret-face family owned the hotel and was somehow suspicious of me. Fortunately my conscience was clear. With the single exception of the false name, my behavior was irreproachable. And Mary Ward would be on my side if that question rose. I had been careful to tell her that I used several pseudonyms in my writing.

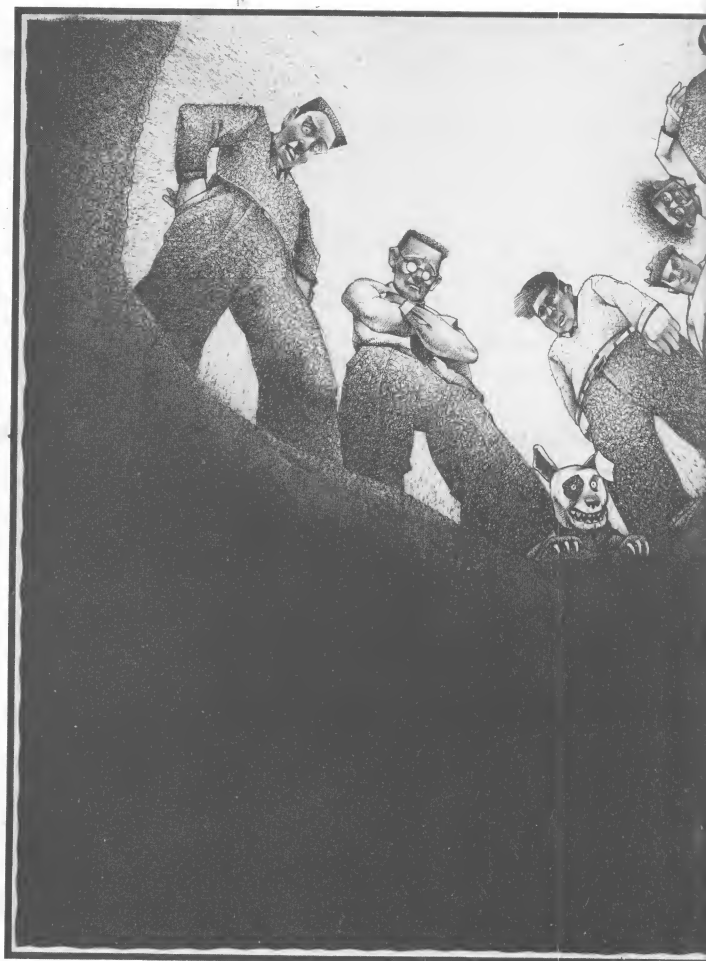
My fictitious publisher's appointment on Bloomsbury Way would last until eleven o'clock, so Mary and I had arranged to meet in the hotel lobby at eleven fifteen. Shortly after the hour I returned briefly to my room to leave off two books that I had brought in Charing Cross Road. Rather surprisingly, I found that the room had already been serviced and cleaned. More surprisingly, it had also been searched.

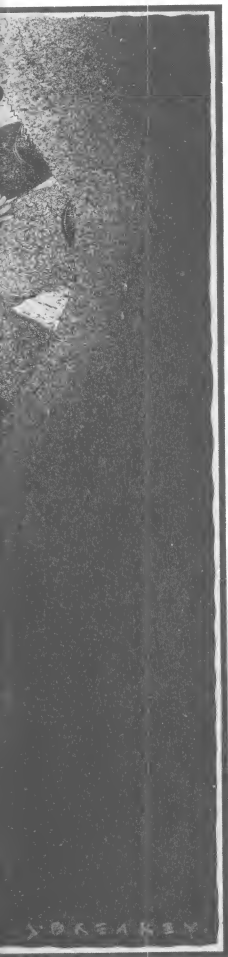
Whoever had been through my cases had done a remarkably careful job. Everything was in the same order as I had left it, even the jumble of dirty clothes. But I am blessed with an extraordinarily sensitive nose, thanks to nature and also to the training provided by my job. Every item in my cases, particularly my passport and travelers' checks, bore a trace of an unfamiliar odor. It was faintly pungent, with suggestions of cumín and cardamom—not at all unpleasant, except in its implications.

I checked every item of value. Not one was missing. But I was quite preoccupied when I went back down to meet Mary.

She did much to drive hotel worries out of my head. At breakfast she had been a little reserved, but the past two hours had given her enough time to make up her mind about me. Now she was more than friendly. She had obviously gone out of her way to make herself attractive for our meeting. A deep blue blouse and matching scarf set off her eyes, and to protect her from the blustery November day, she was wearing a belted white rain-

(continued on page 84)





THE HOLE TRUTH

The citizens of Putnam, Ohio, were faced with a deep and growing problem.

by Lois McMaster Bujold

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN BREAKEY

When each winter thawed to spring, the chuckholes that pocked the streets of Putnam, Ohio, crept from beneath the ice. As edges of Antarctic glaciers thunder into the sea, so in miniature did the flexing pavement crumble inward, widening the zone of decay on the perimeter of these craters with each passing *thunk-ka-CHONK* of a pickup truck's wheels.

So at first no one noticed the new hole in front of Pointer's house. The first man to do so was Waldo Simpson, wheeling into his own driveway one house down. "That sucker busted both mah front shocks," he complained. "Bent 'em right in half. Cost me a hunnert and twenty-eight bucks."

But the people of Milton Street, bred in patience, waited mutely for

the city crews to get around to laying black asphalt scabs over their winter-scarred street. Sometimes it was as late as July, or August, or even the next spring. Meantime, they drove slowly, weaving and darting in unexpected evasion patterns that were the terror of innocent bicyclists.

Upon driving his car with its new shocks back from the muffler-and-brake-repair shop up on Center Street (rumor had it that the mayor's brother-in-law was a silent partner in the enterprise, making the entire interlocking system of chuckhole preservation/car repair a sort of home-grown workfare), Simpson went to inspect the offending hole.

"Damn," he muttered respectfully. "That's a *deep* one."

He stared down into palpable blackness. In the camouflage of the spring rains, it was hard to tell the depth of a chuckhole at a glance. The

HOLE

flat sheen of a puddle could conceal either a mere two-inch dip, hardly worth weaving over the center line into the path of an oncoming Peterbilt, or tire-swallowing caverns that squashed springs and snapped dentures loose. But this hole held no water, only a velvety darkness.

Simpson raised his eyebrows, walked around it, grunted "Huh!" and returned to his garage to continue the tune-up on his lawnmower that had been interrupted twice: once by a trip out to buy a spark plug, and a second time to get the new shocks necessitated by the first errand.

It was not yet warm enough to start the front porch season, when all the neighbors came out of their houses like cicadas emerging from their burrows to blink in the sun and renew old acquaintances suspended since last fall. Therefore it was about a week before anyone else took a close look at the hole.

A tornado watch the night before had set the more imaginative cowering all evening beside their stereos, tuned to the weather bulletins from Putnam's only radio station, WDIP. To their disappointment, no actual twisters had been sighted in the county. But the high winds had rough-pruned dead branches from the silver maple in front of Pointer's house, and so Bill Pointer potted about this morning stuffing the debris into a large plastic trash bag. Residents were not permitted to burn trash, and the city garbage crews refused to pick up any refuse not legally bagged.

A seven-foot branch, its stem marred with black rot and its fan of wilting leaves flickering green-silver-green in the crisp morning breeze, lay half in the gutter. As Pointer bent to pick it up and break it into fragments small enough to fit in his bag (really large limbs defeated this ploy; sometimes he could still fool the garbage men into taking them away by wrapping a bag around the middle of one, in the fashion of a loincloth) his eye was caught by the black blot in the street. Idly, he tested its depth with the end of his branch.

At first he thought it must be filled with mud, for his branch

promptly met a gooey resistance, but one that did not increase with depth. Pointer pushed until he had nothing left to push on but a handful of limp foliage. He pulled back, but the leaves tore in his hand. As he watched, the tips of the branch disappeared into the darkness with a soft sucking sound.

Startled, he felt the hole another branch, and a third. He stopped just short of reaching his hand into the darkness.

"Whatcha got there, Bill?" Asked his neighbor, Harold Kreiger, pausing in the act of dragging his trash bags to the curb for tomorrow's pickup. "That one looks like a champeen axle-breaker."

*Simpson
stared down
into the blackness.
It was hard to
tell the depth of
a chuckhole at a
glance. But this
hole held no
water, only a
velvety darkness.
"Damn," he
muttered respect-
fully, That's
a deep one."*

"It's the one that got Simpson's front shocks last week. Hey, c'mere and take a look at this. This is sorta screwy."

Kreiger stepped across the street to stare down into the hole. "Wow," he began, but had to jump out of the way as a rusted-out Buick, its original color obscured by variegated splotches of aborted paint primer jobs, nearly clipped him.

"Wrong way, you turkey!" Pointer and Kreiger screamed in practiced unison. The car honked an angry denial. Milton Street had been one way for eleven years, but you could still sit on your porch on a summer afternoon and count about one car an hour bucking the flow.

Pointer dropped another stick into the hole. You couldn't see into the blackness, but you could see things

going down into the dark, growing dimmer and more obscured until they disappeared at a depth of about two feet.

"I've never seen anything like it," said Pointer.

Kreiger frowned at it judiciously. "Me neither. Say..." A gloomy satisfaction lit his eye. "I bet I know what it is, at that. It's a sinkhole. I saw one on the news once, someplace down in Florida—opened up in the middle of a street; cracked the sidewalks. Kept on growing—two houses just tipped right into it. Damndest thing you ever saw. Something about the water table dropping."

"What did they do about it?"

"I can't remember. I don't think they said."

Pointer examined the nearby curb and sidewalk nervously for signs of cracking. "It doesn't seem to be growing."

Kreiger snorted. "Course it's growing. It wasn't there before, and it is there now. It had to have grown from something."

Pointer wrinkled his nose, rather dismayed. "It looks dangerous."

"Yeah," Kreiger agreed. "I suppose we ought to mark it with something."

"Reminds me of when I was a kid," said Pointer. "Over to Indian Lake in the summer. People used to put empty Clorox bottles upside down on sticks above the sunken logs—the big ones that ate shear pins—as a sort of public service. Probably saved a bunch of water skiers from castration. You don't see public spirit like that any more."

"Well, let's just..." Kreiger marched to his side of the street, heaved a loaded trash bag from his stack, and plopped it over the hole. "That'll mark it."

"I don't think it would show up too good at night," Pointer objected. "Bet some sucker'll just plow into it and scatter garbage to the end of the street."

Kreiger's lips screwed up, faintly offended at this ungrateful reception of his good deed, but then he sighed agreement. "Yeah, you're probably right." He grabbed the bag by its twist-tied neck and yanked. It didn't move. He pulled harder.

"The bag's breaking," Pointer warned, as the black membrane thinned and stretched across the treacherous corner of a frosted flakes box. Kreiger desisted hastily.

The bag shifted, sank a bit more. Its sides bulged at the edges of the hole like a beer belly settling over its belt; then, with an audible pop, it was sucked down. Pointer could see the

white twist-tie glimmer for a moment, then the darkness returned. The hole gurgled, and both men jumped back.

"I'm going to call the city," Pointer announced after a long pause.

After a very unsatisfactory phone conversation with the city maintenance department ("Everybody claims their chuckholes go to China, Mr. Pointer. We'll get to your street on schedule, I assure you.") and an equally dissatisfying call to the *Putnam Post*, the town's only newspaper ("We've done chuckholes," the reporter explained wearily. "A two-page photo spread on them, last month."), Pointer returned to his front yard.

His neighbor Kreiger, just now dodging a car in the street, was dragging an extremely battered Big Wheel toward the hole. The bright decals had weathered away, the adjustable seat-back was long gone, and the front wheel was flat on one side, ground off halfway to the hub by countless gravel-spinning quick-stops and attempted wheelies.

"Been trying to get the trashmen to pick this up for three weeks," Kreiger panted. "They won't take it. Told me to wait for the spring cleaning truck."

Once a year, the city sent a truck and crew around that promised to pick up *anything*. Old mattresses, piles of shattered wallboard from the last remodeling project, old lumber, anything. Its pick-up schedule and route were surely one of the most closely guarded secrets in Putnam. Pointer could not recall a single year in which he had managed to anticipate it. The truck came in stealth and departed in silence, and only a few hardy souls who put their junk out weeks in advance, turning their yards into dumps as rain-sodden corrugated cardboard boxes slowly disintegrated and the fibrous stuffing leaked from broken-down chairs to the delight of nesting birds, had ever managed to catch it. They always mentioned it to Pointer about two weeks after the truck went by.

In the meantime, the charge for dumping a personal load, no matter how small, at the city landfill was a stiff \$12.50. The only other known method for getting rid of bulky trash was to sneak down at night and cram it in the Goodwill box at the supermarket parking lot, a dubious practice that Pointer spurned.

Pointer watched in fearful fascination as the Big Wheel went down the hole. The back end jammed up, until

a chunk of asphalt broke away and both chunk and toy vanished. "Is that, uh, safe?"

"Dunno," said Kreiger cheerfully. "I don't see why not. How else would you fix a sinkhole, but by filling it up till it stops sinking?"

That seemed logical. Pointer remembered some large carpet scraps molding in the back of his garage. The neighborhood cats made them a napping zone and occasionally, judging from the acrid odor they had acquired, a latrine. Rolled lengthwise, they just might fit...

By the next morning the hole had widened, to about a yard in diameter.



Several neighbors gathered to stare at it uneasily. Instead of filling it, the objects dumped down it seemed to increase its appetite.

Tom Higgins, who changed his own oil and surreptitiously sprinkled the used gook up and down the alley, now poured in his full drip-pan. It fell slowly, hanging below street level in a peculiar rope for a few moments before dispersing. Herb Smith tossed in three gallon cans of dried-up paint, just for the fascination of it, since he might easily have bagged them with his regular trash. Johnny Oporto shoved in a door panel from a 1974 Ford Maverick that had sat for a decade in his garage waiting to get the dents pounded out and be repainted. The car it had belonged to was itself but a memory.

When she thought no one was

looking, Emily Ludwig, a sociopathic nine-year-old with the personality of a piranha and a nasal whine that could penetrate six-inch concrete, told her younger brother that it was a hole down to the devil, and attempted to force him into it. Five years of Emily had taught him self-defense, however, and he kicked her in the shin and escaped. Listening to her piercing screams, which were clearly audible for at least two city blocks, Pointer had to stifle an overmastering impulse to drop Emily in.

Some of Milton Street's mothers now began to perceive the hole as a safety hazard. Louise Haines, the most hyper of them, was the first to phone the police. They had dealt with her before, however, and the desk sergeant merely hinted that perhaps her Lithium dosage was out of whack again. Offended, she hung up and refused to call back.

Later, one of the other parents got through, and in the afternoon a squad car stopped by. The fresh-faced patrol man got out and stared at the hole a while. About this time (3:30 p.m.), Nick Baines appeared with a full-sized mattress, pulped and hollowed out at hip level with spring wires poking out of the covering (the mattress was fifteen years old, and Nick weighed nearly 300 pounds). It took some shoving, but the mattress went down, abrading and widening the edges of the hole in its passage. "It's a sinkhole," Nick explained perhaps reminded of certain city littering ordinances by the policeman's presence. "We're filling it in."

The young policeman scratched his head, swallowed, and spat casually to conceal his amazement. He drove away, but came back later with two orange-painted wooden sawhorses and an oil pot, round and black like an anarchist's bomb topped by a little yellow flame that licked and smoked, and set them around the hole. "It's the best I can do for now," he apologized. "The road maintenance crews are only working the west side this week."

"Yes, I know," said Pointer.

A geology professor from the State University branch campus was called in by his cousin, one of the Milton Street residents. The professor pontificated knowingly on sinkholes and limestone caverns and underground streams, until he actually saw the hole, and fell strangely silent. A long-time Putnam resident himself, however, the professor was seen late that night by the flickering Halloween light of the oil pot pulling a cracked

HOLE

and dusty toilet bowl and two frayed snow tires from the back of his station wagon and stuffing them down the hole before speeding off.

By the next morning the orange sawhorses were teetering on the hole's widening edge, and unauthorized dumpers were trickling in from all over town. It began with Milton residents' relatives, but it didn't stop there.

Pointer saw three total strangers come in a pickup truck. The two men made an entire sofa-bed, its wooden frame cracked and its greasy beige upholstery shredded by a tribe of cats, disappear. The woman accompanying them clapped her hands with joy as it sank out of sight.

The Milton Street Citizens' Committee sprang up to defend itself from foreign trash, or would have, had it been able to present a united front. It degenerated rapidly into an European-style multi-party system, the neatniks versus the don't-cares versus the isolationists.

Kreiger, the natural leader of the don't-cares, put his party's position succinctly. "It don't smell and it don't show. Why worry?"

The limited-resource theorists, headed up by Mrs. Frenkel, observed, "We don't know how deep the hole goes. How can we be sure there will be room for our children's trash?"

The isolationists, led by Lithium Louise, chipped in with an appeal to deep-seated American paranoiac tradition: "You don't know *where* their trash has been!"

Bill Pointer thought a more urgent question was, *Where is their trash going?* but about this time the Committee dissolved in acrimonious debate, and Pointer left to drink a cold Miller alone in his backyard without voicing the question. When he was done he took the can out to the street and dropped it in the hole.

The hole's growth rate slowed, to Pointer's secret relief. Two days later, the City Engineer himself came out.

"It's about time," said Pointer.

"You see? Democracy does work on the local level," Smith noted proudly.

"I heard he gives the street-salting contract to his brother," Ted Frenkel

whispered darkly, "and that's why we're short changed."

"I thought no-salt was an economy measure just till they got the bond issue passed, along with turning out every second street light and closing the Oak Street Fire Station."

"Naw, it was the anti-flouridation lobby. They blocked salting three years ago."

"I didn't know there was any fluoride in street salt..."

The city engineer wore a white hard hat, and walked around with a clipboard. He measured the circumference with a gleaming metal device that looked like a baby buggy wheel on a stick, and consulted with his

Pointer idly tested its depth with the end of his branch. He pulled back, but the leaves tore in his hand.

As he watched the tips of the branch disappeared into the hole with a soft sucking sound.

assistant in a low tone. When he turned past the group of anxious Milton Street residents hovering on the sidewalk, he was smiling.

"Is it all right?" Louise Haines called in concern. "Can you plug it up?"

"Is it going to stop spreading?"

"Are we going to be assessed for this?" Kreiger asked, even more anxiously.

The engineer waved vaguely, and his pace quickened toward his truck. "It's all being taken care of, folks."

"Taken care of how?" Nick Baines demanded edgily, blocking his path.

"Well..." the engineer paused.

"You know, Putnam has a long-standing solid waste disposal problem..."

Everybody knew; the *Post* featured weekly articles on it, and the controversy occupied half the letters-to-the-editor column for three days

after each article. The proposed incinerator plant required a large bond issue, and the people of Putnam had not passed a bond issue in four years. Then there was the proposed Sully Township landfill site, plagued by lawsuits. Geological reports on potential groundwater contamination varied wildly depending on which side hired the geologists.

The residents of Putnam agreed that the residents of Sully Township were a selfish bunch, without public spirit. The residents of Sully Township suggested, in inflammatory letters to the *Putnam Post*, that the residents of the Putnam could pile their trash in front of City Hall, or compact it and store it in even more intimate places. Garbled quotes from leaked EPA reports flew back and forth like bullets. The president of the League of Women Voters and the Chairwoman of the Sully Township Concerned Citizens' Committee were rumored to be close to trial by combat in city council meetings.

Meanwhile, the surface of the present landfill had risen from concave to level to convex, and was beginning to bulge ominously, like the side of Mount St. Helens before the eruption. Stiff notes from the EPA threatening to close down the landfill entirely arrived daily at Putnam City Hall.

"Well?" demanded Baines of the engineer.

"Well ... We may have found the solution."

The Milton Street Citizens' Committee was instantly united in the face of their common enemy.

"You can't make Milton Street into a city dump!"

"All those big trucks turning around—children play here, you know—they might back over one..."

"It's our hole!"

"Yeah," agreed Waldo Simpson. "I found it. Got the repair bill to prove it, too."

The engineer sniffed. "Unlike Sully Township," he replied loftily, "this here hole is already city property. The city owns the streets right up to the sidewalks."

"No way, José!" shouted Kreiger. "You got to get a EPA environmental impact study first! That's the law!"

The engineer shot him a look of loathing at the mention of the EPA. "We'll see," he said stiffly. He slammed the door of his truck loudly and drove off, leaving consternation in his wake.

The next morning on the way out to water the newly planted petunias in

the white-painted tractor tire that was Pointer's concession to the art of landscape gardening, he wandered over to inspect the hole, and maybe move the sawhorses back a tad if necessary. To Pointer's surprise, it wasn't necessary. Far from enlarging, the hole seemed to have shrunk in the night. Between the crater edge of ragged broken pavement and the sharp circle of unsettling midnight was a ring of fine dry dust an inch wide. When Pointer checked it again that evening, it was two inches wide.

"It's going away," he theorized hopefully. "Back where it came from."

The Milton Street Citizens' Committee breathed a collective sigh of relief, then broke up into individual forays into garages and attics for last-chance cleaning out. The hole closed more rapidly than it had grown. By the next morning it had shrunk to a tiny black dot.

"It's gone!" cried Mrs. Ludwig, Emily's mother, ecstatically. "Now I can let the children out!"

"Not quite," said Pointer. He fed the hole a couple of grass blades, which disappeared just the way the original tree branches had, only in miniature. "Not quite..."

The city engineer revisited Milton Street, and left ten minutes later, his shoulders slumped in bitter disappointment. Upon shouted inquiries from the residents as to when the road gang was going to get out here and patch the thing, he merely pulled his hard hat down over his eyes and muttered, "You're on the schedule."

Three days later, the paving crew still had not come. Bill Pointer was on his hands and knees rooting out crabgrass clumps in his front lawn. Harold Kreiger, whose attitude to the competing plant species in his own lawn was survival of the fittest, stood on the sidewalk kibitzing.

"Too bad our hole filled up so soon," Kreiger mourned. "I never did get around to cleaning out my basement. It was real handy. Still, it wouldn't been so good if our houses had fallen in. At least it didn't have alligators come to live in it like that one down in Florida."

"You still think it was a sinkhole?" Pointer paused and straightened up to relieve his back.

"Sure, what else?"

"I don't know. I always wondered..." Pointer hesitated, "...if maybe it might have been..."

A soft popping noise from the street startled both men. Their heads

swivelled toward it.

The hole was back, as abruptly as that, and in its full diameter—maybe a bit more. Pointer could not tell how far under the edge of the street the circle might extend.

"By God, maybe I can get rid of that old card table," Kreiger cried happily, starting to across the sidewalk with renewed energy.

Pointer scrambled to his feet and grabbed Kreiger's arm. "Wait—"

"Why wait? It could go away again at any minute..."

"I just wondered—"

From out of the circle of darkness, movement. A narrow, bronze-gleaming rod was launched like a



missile from its silo, to arc through the air and land with a clatter on the street yards away. Both Pointer and Kreiger recoiled. Pointer recognized the missile as Nick Baines's old pole lamp, the last piece of trash to be stuffed down the constricting hole last week.

"...if it might have been a doorway," Pointer finished in a whisper.

Then the volcano erupted. Cars swerved and traffic backed up as the hole belched forth in as many minutes all the trash it had swallowed in days. Baby buggies, broken toys, black plastic trashbags that exploded like fetid shrapnel on impact with street or sidewalk—wherever the stuff had been the past few weeks, it had experienced time at the same rate as Milton Street—and numerous other objects hauntingly recognizable. A stained and

greasy sofa bed unfolded as it soared, as if planning to glide away into the trees like some vast bat, but it landed in the street with a massive boom that shook the ground and cracked the pavement. A porcelain commode, landing, burst into flying white potsherds. Two tires shot skyward, to bounce down the sides of the accumulating pile and chase each other, rolling all the way to the corner, where they spooked a Subaru into swerving up onto the sidewalk and crashing into an oak tree.

All the residents of Milton Street rushed onto their front porches, where they prudently remained under cover, to watch aghast as a new mountain formed before their eyes.

The end came at last. A battered Big Wheel popped from the caldera and clattered end over end down the sides of the pile to fetch up in a mess of scree at the bottom. Then three or four sticks, then a seven-foot branch. Then silence.

Pointer breathed a shaky sigh, and crept from the shelter of his front porch where he had clung with Kreiger.

Kreiger, a sociable man who attended church and Bible study, quavered, "The last shall be first, and the first, last... is that all?"

"I think so," muttered Pointer. They tiptoed to the foot of the fifteen- or twenty-foot high mountain, which had overflowed Pointer's sidewalk and buried his petunia tire, and stared in amazement.

A muffled *foomp* broke the silence. Pointer and Kreiger jumped back six feet as yet another object hiccuped out of the crater and skidded down the sides. Then another. A third rolled to Pointer's feet.

"Holy shit!" cried Kreiger, forgetting his Christianity again. "What the hell's that? It looks like an electric rutabaga."

Pointer picked it up gingerly. It was an utterly unintelligible artifact. It seemed to have a set of keys on the side, much too narrow for Pointer's fingers, but they did not give when touched. Its irregular surface flickered briefly with a swirling iridescence that hurt Pointer's eyes, then with a sad peep it faded to a dead grey.

"I think," he swallowed, as the Milton Street Citizens' Committee huddled fearfully around him, hushing to hear his words, "I think it's somebody else's trash."

They lifted up their eyes onto the hill, as a fourth glittering object arced out the top and fell like a star onto the corrugated asphalt of Milton Street. ■

BLACK

(continued from page 29)

watched.

Frank had found a fat, scented decorative candle in the kitchen pantry, and now he put it inside the pumpkin. It was big enough to burn for a couple of days. Dreading the appearance of light in the jack-o'-lantern's eyes, Tommy watched as Frank lit the candle and put the pumpkin's stem-centered lid in place.

The slitted pupils glowed-flickered-shimmered with a convincing imitation of demonic life and malevolent intellect. The serrated grin blazed bright, and the fluttering light was like a tongue ceaselessly licking the cold rind lips. The most disgusting part of the illusion of life was the leprosy pit of a nose, which appeared to fill with moist, yellowish mucus.

"Incredible!" Frank said.

The scented candle emitted the fragrance of roses.

Though he could not remember where he had read of such a thing, Tommy recalled that the sudden, unexplained scent of roses supposedly indicated the presence of spirits of the dead. But of course, the source of this odor was no mystery.

"What the hell?" Frank said, wrinkling his nose. He lifted the lid of the jack-o'-lantern and peered inside. The instant orange light played across his face, queerly distorting his features. "This is supposed to be a lemon-scented candle."

In the big airy kitchen, Lois and Kyle Sutzman, Tommy's mother and father, were standing at the table with the caterer, Mr. Howser. They were looking over the menu for tomorrow night's flashy Halloween party, reminding Mr. Howser that all the food was to be prepared with the very best ingredients.

Tommy circled behind them, hoping to remain invisible. He took a can of Coke from the refrigerator.

Now, his mother and father were hammering at the caterer about the need for everything to be "impressive." Hors d'oeuvres, flowers, the bar, the waiters' uniforms, and the buffet dinner must be so elegant and exquisite that every guest would feel himself to be in the home of true California aristocracy.

This was not a party for kids. In fact, Tommy and Frank would be required to remain in their rooms tomorrow evening, permitted to engage only in the quietest activities: no television, no stereo, no slightest peep to draw attention to themselves.

This party was strictly for the movers and shakers on whom Kyle Sutzmann's political career depended. He was now a California State Senator, but in next week's election he was running for the United States Congress. This party was a thank you to his biggest financial backers and to the power brokers who had pulled strings to insure his nomination last spring. Kids verboten.

Tommy's parents seemed to want him around only at major campaign rallies, media photography sessions,

Tommy watched as Frank lit the candle. The slitted eyes shimmered with demonic life and malevolent intellect. The serrated grin blazed bright, and the fluttering light was like a tongue.

and for a few minutes at the start of election-night victory parties. That was okay with Tommy. He preferred to remain invisible because, on those rare occasions when they took notice of him, his folks invariably disapproved of everything he said and did, every movement he made, every innocent expression that crossed his face.

Lois said, "Mr. Howser, I hope we understand that large shrimp do not qualify as finger lobster."

As the caterer reassured her of the quality of his operation, Tommy sidled silently away from the refrigerator and quietly extracted two Milanos from the cookie jar.

"These are important people," Kyle informed the caterer for the tenth time, "and they are accustomed to the very best."

In school, Tommy had been taught that politics was the means by which many enlightened people chose to serve their fellow men. He knew that was baloney. His parents spent long evenings plotting his father's political career, and Tommy had never once overheard either of them talk about serving the people or improving society. Oh sure in public, on campaign platforms, that was what they talked about—"the rights of the masses, the hungry, the homeless"—but never in private. Beyond the public eye, they endlessly discussed "forming power bases" and "crushing the opposition" and "shoving this new law down their throats." To them and to all the people with whom they associated, politics was a way to gain respect, make some money, and—most important—acquire power.

Tommy understood why people liked to be respected because he got no respect at all. He could see why money was desirable. But he did not understand this power thing. He could not figure why anyone would waste a lot of time and energy trying to acquire power over other people. What fun could you get out of ordering people around, telling them what to do? What if you told them to do the wrong thing, and then what if, because of your orders, people were hurt or wound up broke or with other bad problems? And how could you expect people to like you if you had power over them? Frank had power over Tommy—complete power, total control—and Tommy loathed him.

Sometimes, he thought he was the only sane person in his family. At other times, he wondered if they were all sane and if he was mad. Whatever the case, crazy or sane, Tommy always felt that he did not belong in the same house with his own family.

As he slipped stealthily out of the kitchen with his can of Coke and two Milanos wrapped in a paper napkin, his parents were querying Mr. Howser about the quality of the champagne.

In the back hallway, Frank's door was open, and Tommy paused for a glimpse of the pumpkin. It was still there, fire in every aperture.

"What you got there?" Frank asked, stepping into the doorway. He grabbed Tommy by the shirt and yanked him into the room, slammed the door, took away the cookies and Coke. "Thanks, snoface. I was just thinking I could use a snack." He went to the desk and put the booty beside the glowing jack-o'-lantern.

Taking a deep breath, steeling

himself for what resistance would mean, Tommy said, "Those are mine."

Frank pretended shock. "Is my little brother a greedy glutton who doesn't know how to share?"

"Give me back my Coke and cookies."

Frank's grin was sharklike. "Good heavens, dear brother, I think you need to be taught a lesson. Greedy little gluttons have to be shown the path of enlightenment."

Tommy would have preferred to walk away, to let Frank win, to go back to the kitchen and get another Coke and more cookies. However, he knew that his life, already intolerable, would get worse if he did not make an effort, no matter how futile, to stand up to this stranger who was supposedly his brother. Total, willing capitulation would enflame Frank and encourage him to be even more of a bully than he already was.

"I want my cookies and my Coke," Tommy insisted.

Frank rushed him. They fell to the floor, pummeling each other, rolling, kicking, but producing little noise. They neither shouted nor squealed because they didn't want to draw their folks' attention. Tommy was reluctant to let his parents know what was happening because they would invariably blame the ruckus on him. Athletic, well-tanned Frank was their dream child, their favorite son, and he could do no wrong. Frank probably wanted to keep the battle secret because their father would put a stop to it, thereby spoiling the fun.

Throughout the tussle, Tommy had brief glimpses of the glowing jack-o'-lantern, which looked down on them, and he was sure that its grin grew steadily wider, wider.

At last beaten, exhausted, Tommy was driven into a corner. Straddling him, Frank slapped him once, hard, rattling his senses, then tore at Tommy's clothes, pulling them off.

"No!" Tommy whispered when he realized that, in addition to being beaten, he was to be humiliated. "No, no."

He struggled with what little strength he still possessed, but his shirt was stripped off, his jeans and underwear yanked down. With his pants tangled around his sneakers, he was pulled to his feet and half-carried across the room. Frank threw open the door, pitched Tommy into the hallway, and called, "Oh, Maria! Maria, can you come here a moment, please?"

Maria was the twice-a-week maid

who came in to clean and do the ironing, and this was one of her days.

"Maria!"

Naked, terrified of being humiliated in front of the maid, Tommy scrambled to his feet, grabbed at his pants, tried to run and pull up his jeans at the same time, stumbled, fell, and got up again.

"Maria, can you come here, please?" Frank asked, barely able to get the words out between gales of laughter.

Gasping, whimpering, Tommy somehow reached his room and got out of sight before Maria appeared. For a while he just leaned against the closed door, holding up his jeans with both hands, shivering.

With their parents off at a cam-



paign appearance, Tommy and Frank had dinner together, heating up a casserole that Maria had left in the refrigerator. Ordinarily, dinner with Frank was an ordeal, but this time it was uneventful. As he ate, Frank was engrossed in a magazine that reported on the latest horror movies, with an emphasis on slice-and-dice films and with lots of full-color photographs of mutilated and blood-soaked bodies; he seemed oblivious of Tommy.

Later, when Frank was in the bathroom preparing for bed, Tommy sneaked into his older brother's room and stood at the desk, studying the jack-o'-lantern. The wicked mouth glowed. The narrow pupils were alive with fire.

The scent of roses filled the room, but underlying that odor was another

more subtle and less appealing fragrance that he could not quite identify.

Tommy was aware of a malevolent presence—something even worse than the malevolence that he could *always* sense in Frank's room. A cold current raced through his blood.

Suddenly he was certain that the potential murderous power of the black pumpkin was enhanced by the candle within it. Somehow, the presence of light within its shell was dangerous, a triggering factor. Tommy did not know how he knew this, but he was convinced that, if he were to have the slightest chance of surviving the coming night, he must extinguish the flame.

He grasped the gnarly stem and removed the lid from the top of the jack-o'-lantern's skull.

Light did not merely rise from inside the pumpkin but seemed to be flung up at him, hot on his face, stinging his eyes.

He blew out the flame.

The jack-o'-lantern went dark.

Immediately, Tommy felt better.

He put the lid in place. As he let go of the stem, the candle re-lit spontaneously.

Stunned, he jumped back. Light shone forth from the carved eyes, nose, and mouth.

"No," he said softly.

He edged forward, removed the lid, and blew the candle out again.

A moment of darkness within the pumpkin. Then, before his eyes, the flame reappeared.

Reluctantly, issuing a thin involuntary sound of distress, Tommy reached into the jack-o'-lantern to snuff the stubborn candle with his thumb and forefinger. He was convinced that the pumpkin shell would suddenly snap shut around his wrist, instantly severing his hand, leaving him with a bloody stump. Or perhaps it would hold him fast while dissolving the flesh from his fingers, then would release him with an arm that terminated in a skeletal hand. Driven toward the brink of hysteria by those fears, he pinched the wick, extinguished the flame, and snatched his hand back with a sob of relief at having escaped mutilation.

He jammed the lid in place and, hearing the toilet flush in the bathroom, hurried out of the room. He dared not let Frank catch him there. As he stepped into the hallway, he glanced back at the jack-o'-lantern, and of course it was full of candlelight again.

BLACK

He went straight to the kitchen and got a butcher's knife, which he took back to his own room and hid beneath his pillow. He was sure that he would need it sometime in the dead hours before dawn.

His parents came home shortly before midnight.

Tommy was sitting in bed, his room illuminated only by the pale bulb of the low-wattage night light. The butcher's knife was at his side, under the covers, and in fact his hand was resting on the haft.

For twenty minutes, Tommy could hear them talking, running water, flushing toilets, opening and closing doors. Their bedroom and bath were at the opposite end of the house from his and Frank's rooms, so the noises they made were muffled but nonetheless reassuring. These were the ordinary noises of daily life, and as long as the house was filled with them, surely no unnatural lumen-eyed predator could be stalking anyone. Soon, however, quiet returned. In the post-midnight stillness, Tommy waited for the first scream.

He was determined not to fall asleep. But he was only twelve years old, and he was exhausted after a long day and drained by the sustained terror that had gripped him ever since he had seen the mummy-faced pumpkin carver. Propped against a pile of pillows, he dozed off long before one o'clock . . .

. . . and something thumped, waking him.

He was instantly alert. He sat straight up in bed, clutching the butcher's knife.

For a moment he was certain the sound had originated within his own room. Then he heard it again, a solid thump, and he knew that it had come from Frank's room.

He threw aside the covers and sat on the edge of the bed, tense. Waiting. Listening.

Once, he thought he heard Frank calling his name—"Toooooommmmyyy"—a desperate and frightened and barely audible cry that seemed to come from the far rim of a vast canyon. Perhaps he imagined it.

Silence.

His hands were slick with sweat. He put the knife aside and blotted his palms on his pajamas.

Silence.

He picked up the knife again. He reached under his bed and found the flashlight he kept there, but he did not switch it on. He went cautiously to the door and listened for movements in the hallway beyond. Nothing.

An inner voice urged him to return to bed, pull the covers over his head, and forget what he had heard. Better yet, he could crawl under the bed and hope that he would not be found. But he knew this was the voice of the wimp within, and he dared to hope for salvation in cowardice. If the black pumpkin had grown into something else, and if it was now

The creature lurched into view, filling the doorway. It raised one thin, powerful, vinelike arm, and thrust a rootlike finger at him. "You!" it said, in a whispery voice.

loose in the house, it would respond to timidity with no less savage glee than Frank would have shown.

God, he thought fervently, there's a boy down here who believes in You, and he'd be very disappointed if You happened to be looking the other way right now when he really, really, really needs You.

Tommy quietly turned the knob and opened the door. The hallway, illuminated only by the moonlight that streamed through the window at end, was deserted.

Directly across the hall, the door to Frank's room stood open.

Still not switching on the flashlight, desperately hoping that his presence would go undetected if he was mantled in darkness, he stepped to Frank's doorway and listened. Frank usually snored, but no snoring

could be heard tonight. If the jack-o'-lantern was in there, the candle had been extinguished at last, for no flickering paraffin light was visible.

Tommy crossed the threshold.

Moonlight silvered the window, on which danced the palm-frond shadows of a wind-stirred tree. In the room, no object was clearly outlined. Mysterious shapes loomed in shades of dark gray and black.

He took one step. Two. Three.

His heart pounded so hard that it shattered his resolve to cloak himself in darkness. He snapped on the Eveready and was startled by the way the butcher's knife, in his right hand, reflected the light.

He swept the beam around the room and, to his relief, saw no crouching monstrosity. The sheets and blankets were tumbled in a pile on the mattress, and he had to take another step toward the bed before he was able to ascertain that Frank was not there.

The severed hand was on the floor by the night stand. Tommy saw it in the penumbra of the flashlight, and he brought the beam to bear directly on it. He stared in shock. Frank's hand. No doubt about its identity, for Frank's silver skull-and-crossbones ring gleamed brightly on one slug-white finger. It was curled into a tight fist.

Perhaps powered by a post-mortem nerve spasm, perhaps powered by darker forces, the fisted hand suddenly opened, the fingers unfolding like the spreading petals of a flower. In the palm was a single, shiny nickel.

Tommy stifled a wild shriek but could not repress a series of violent shudders.

Frantically trying to decide which escape route might be safest, he heard his mother scream from the far end of the house. Her shrill cry was abruptly cut off. Something crashed.

Tommy turned toward the doorway of Frank's room. He knew he should run before it was too late, but he was as welded to this spot as he had been to that bit of dusty ground when the pumpkin carver had insisted on telling him what the jack-o'-lantern would become during the lonely hours of the night.

He heard his father shout.

A gunshot.

His father screamed.

This screamed was also cut short.

Silence again.

Tommy tried to lift one foot, just one, just an inch off the floor, but it would not be lifted. He sensed that

more than fear was holding him down, that some malevolent spell prevented him from escaping the black pumpkin.

A door slammed at the other end of the house.

Footsteps sounded in the hall. Heavy, scraping footsteps.

Tears slipped out of Tommy's eyes and down his cheeks.

In the hall, the floorboards creaked and groaned as if under a great weight.

Staring at the open door with no less trepidation than if he had been gazing into the entrance of Hell, Tommy saw flickering orange light in the corridor. The glow grew brighter as the source—no doubt a candle—drew nearer from the left, from the direction of his parents' bedroom.

Amorphous shadows and eerie snakes of light crawled on the hall carpet.

The heavy footsteps slowed. Stopped.

Judging by the light, the thing was only a foot or two from the doorway.

Tommy swallowed hard and worked up enough spit to say, *Who's there?* but he was surprised to hear himself say instead, "Okay, damn you, let's get it over with." Perhaps his years in the Sutzmann house had toughened him more thoroughly and had made him more fatalistic than he had previously realized.

The creature lurched into view, filling the doorway.

Its head was formed by the jack-o'-lantern, which had undergone strange and hideous changes. The head had retained its black and orange coloring and its peculiar gourdlike shape, narrower at the top than at the bottom, and all the tumorous nodules were as crusted and disgusting as ever. Once huge, however, once as large as any pumpkin Tommy had ever seen, it was now the size of a basketball, shriveled. The eyes had sagged, though the slitted pupils were still narrow and mean. The nose was bubbling with some vile mucus. The immense mouth stretched from ear to ear, for it had remained large while the rest of the face had shrunk around it. In the orange light that streamed out between them, the hooked fangs appeared to have been transformed from points of pumpkin rind into hard, sharp protuberances of bone.

The body under the head was vaguely humanoid, though it seemed to be composed of thick gnarled roots and tangled vines. The thing looked immensely strong, a colossus, a jug-

ernaut if it wished to be. Even in his terror, Tommy was filled with awe, and he wondered if the creature's body had been grown from the substance that had been leached from its previously enormous head and, more pointedly, from the flesh of Frank, Lois, and Kyle Sutzmann.

The worst was the orange light within the skull. The candle still burned in there, and its leaping flame emphasized the impossible emptiness of its head—how could it move and think without a brain?—and invested a savage and demonic awareness in its eyes.

It raised one thick, twisted, powerful, vinelike arm and thrust a rootlike finger at him. "You," it said, in a deep whispery voice that made him think of wet slush pouring down



drain.

Tommy was now less surprised by his inability to move than by his ability to stand erect. His legs felt like rags. He was sure he was going to collapse and lay helpless while the thing descended upon him, but somehow he stayed on his feet, the flashlight in one hand and the butcher's knife in the other.

The knife. Useless. It would do no harm to this adversary, so he let it slip out of his sweaty fingers. It clattered to the floor.

"You," the black pumpkin repeated, its deep voice reverberating moistly through the room. "Your vicious brother got what he gave. Your mother got what she gave. Your father got what he gave. I fed on them, sucked the brains out of their heads, chewed up their flesh, dissolved

their bones. Now what do you deserve?"

Tommy could not speak. He was shaking and weeping silently and dragging each breath into his lungs only with tremendous effort.

The black pumpkin lurched out of the doorway, into the room, looming over him, eyes blazing.

It stood six and a half feet tall, and had to tilt its lantern head to look down at him. Curls of black smoke from the candle's sooty wick escaped between its fangs and out of its leprous nose.

Speaking in a whisper, yet with such force that its words vibrated the windowpanes, the thing said, "Unfortunately, you are a good boy, and I've no right to feed on you. What you deserve is what you've got from now on—freedom."

Tommy stared up into the grotesque face, not yet understanding what he had been told.

"Freedom," the demonic beast repeated. "Freedom from Frank and Lois and Kyle. Freedom to grow up without their heels pressing down on you. Freedom to be the best you can be, which means I'll probably never get a chance to feed on you."

For a long time they stood there, face to face, boy and beast, and gradually Tommy achieved complete understanding. In the morning, his parents and Frank would be missing. Never to be found. A great and enduring mystery. Tommy would have to live with his grandparents. You get what you give.

"But maybe," the black pumpkin said, putting the cold monstrous hand upon Tommy's shoulder, "maybe there's some rottenness in you, too, and maybe someday you'll surrender to it, and maybe I'll have my chance with you, too, in time. Dessert." Its wide grin widened even farther. "Now get back to your bed and sleep. Sleep."

Simultaneously horrified and joyous, Tommy crossed the room to the doorway, moving as if in a dream. He looked back and saw the black pumpkin watching him.

He said, "You missed a bit," and pointed to the floor beside the nightstand.

The beast looked at Frank's severed hand. "Ahhhh," the black pumpkin said, snatching up the hand and stuffing that grisly morsel into its mouth. The flame within its skull suddenly burned very bright, a hundred times brighter than before, then was extinguished. ■

RED LIGHT

(continued from page 39)

wind caught and blew them. I had opened the shutters on the shore side, and the wooden blades of the ceiling fan cast down cool air to prick the our flesh, sweat-speckled from fervent but honest lovemaking.

A lot of women had drifted through my viewfinder after Tasha had left me. Except for two or three mental time-bombs and outright snow queens, I coupled enthusiastically with all of them. I forgot how to say no. Sometimes I was artificially nice; most of the time I was making the entire sex pay because one of their number had dumped me. The right people found out my name, yes. My studio filled up with eager young lovelies. No brag, just a living. I settled into a pattern of rejecting them about the time they tried to form any sort of lasting attachment, or tried to storm my meticulously erected walls. Some of them were annoyingly persistent, but I got good at predicting when they would turn sloppy and pleading ... and that made snuffing their flames oddly fulfilling. I was consistent, if not happy. I took a perverse pleasure in booting cover girls out of my bed on a regular basis, and hoped that Joe Normal was envious as hell.

Lust. Envy. Admirable goals, I thought, as she lay with her hair covering my face, both of her legs hugging one of mine. We had turned out to be pretty much alike after all.

When I mumbled, she stirred from her doze. "What ... ?"

"I said, I want a picture of you, just like you are, right this moment."

Her eyes snapped open, gleaming in the faint light. "No." She spoke into the hollow of my neck, her voice distant, the sound of it barely impressing the air. "No pictures. No more pictures. Ever."

The businessman part of my brain perked up: *What neurosis could this be?* Was Tasha Vode abandoning her career? Would it be as successful as her abandonment of me? And what was the difference? For what she earned in a month, I could buy the beach frontage below for several miles in both directions. What difference? I'd gotten her back, against all the rules of reality, and here I was looking for the loop-

hole. Her career had cleaved up apart, and now it was making us cleave back together. Funny how a word can have opposing definitions.

After five minutes of tossing and turning, she decided not to make me work for it. "Got anything warm?" She cracked a helpless smile. "Down in the kitchen, I mean."

"Real cocoa. Loaded with crap that's bad for you. Not from an enve-

*Her eyes
snapped open,
gleaming in the
faint light. "No."
She spoke into
the hollow of
my neck, her
voice distant,
the sound of
it barely
impressing the
air. "No pictures.
No more
pictures. Ever."*

lope. Topped with marshmallows, also real, packed with whatever carcinogens the cocoa doesn't have."

"Sounds luscious. Bring a whole pot."

"You can help."

"No. I want to watch the storm." Water pelted the glass. Now and then lightning would suggest how turbulent the ocean had gotten, and I thought of firing up my beacon. Perhaps there was a seafarer out there who was as romantic about boats as I was about lighthouses, and he'd gotten caught in the squall without the latest in high-tech directional doodads.

I did it. Then I dusted off an old TV tray for use as a serving platter, and brought the cocoa pot and accoutrements up the narrow stairs, clanking and rattling all the way.

My carbon-arc beam scanned the surface of the water in long, lazy turns. She was facing her diaphanous reflection in the glass, looking through her own image into the dark void beyond.

I had pulled on canvas pants to make the kitchen run, but Tasha was still perfectly naked and nakedly perfect, a siren contemplating shipwrecks. She drifted back from the window. I pitied my imaginary seafarer, stuck out in the cold, away from the warmth of her.

"You know those natives in Africa?" she asked as I served. "The ones who wouldn't let missionaries take their pictures because they thought the camera would trap their souls?"

"It's a common belief. West Indians still hold to the voodoo value of snapshots. *Mucho* mojo. Even bad snapshots." I couldn't help that last remark. What a pro I am.

"You remember April McClanahan?" She spoke toward the sea. To my reflection.

"You mean Crystal Climax, right?"

She nodded. "Also of wide renown as Cherry Whipp."

All three were a lady with whom Tasha had shared a garret during her flirtation with the hardcore film industry in the early 1970s. Don't swallow the negative hype for a second—every woman who is anyone in film or modeling has made similar contacts. Tasha never moved beyond a couple of relatively innocuous missionary-position features, respectable porn for slumming middle-class couples; a one-week run at the Pussycat Theatre, max. April, on the other hand, moved into the porn mainstream—*Hustler* covers, videocassette topline, "Fully Erect" notices in the film ratings. And no, she didn't get strangled or blow her brains all over a motel room with a Saturday Night Special. Last I heard, she was doing TV commercials for bleach and fabric softener as "Valerie Winston," sort of a Marilyn Chambers in reverse.

"April once told me she'd figured out, with a calculator, that she was responsible for more orgasms in one year than anybody else," Tasha said, holding the big porcelain mug with both hands to warm her palms. "She averaged out how many movie houses were showing her films, how many times per day, multiplied by however many guys she figured were getting their jollies in the audience per show. Plus whoever was doing likewise to her pictures in God knows how many stroke magazines. Or gratifying themselves to the sex advice column she did for *Leather Life*. I remember her looking at me and saying, 'Think of all the energy that must produce. All

those orgasms were born because of me. Me."

"I'm sure there are legions of guys getting their jollies to your photos, too," I said. "No doubt, somebody is out there yanking his crank to Christie Brinkley's smile, right now."

"It's not the same thing. April was tough. She got something back." She sat on the bed facing me, tucking her legs beneath her. She reminded me of Edvard Eridsen's famous sculpture of the little mermaid, rendered not in bronze but shaped from milk-white moonstone, heated by living yellow electricity called down from a black sky, and warmed by warm Arctic eyes—the warmest blue there is in our world.

"You mean April didn't mind getting that porn-star rap laid on her—literally?"

I could see the sadness in her being blotted away by acid bitterness. "The people in porn have it easier. The thuds out there in Bozo-land know in their tiny little hearts that porn stars fuck for jobs. Whereas cover girls or legit models who are rarely seen in the buff, or full-frontal, are suspect."

"You can't deny the public their imaginary intrigues."

"What it always boils down to is, 'Climb off it, bitch—who did you really blow to get that last *Vogue* cover?' They feed off you. They achieve gratification in a far dirtier way, by wanting you and resenting you at the same time. By hating your success enough to keep all the tabloids in business. It's a draining thing, all taking and no giving, like ..."

"Psychic vampirism?" It was so easy for someone in her position to sense that her public loved her only in the way a tumor loves its host. But a blacker part of my mind tasted a subtle tang of revenge. She'd left me to go chase what she wanted ... and when she'd finally sunk in her teeth, she'd gotten the flavor of bile and chalk and ashes. I suppose I should have been ashamed of myself for embracing that hateful satisfaction so readily. And from the hurt neutrality on her face, she might have been reading the thoughts in my head. She watched her cocoa instead of drinking it—always a bad sign.

Just as much as I never said no, I never apologized. Not for anything.

After a cool silence, she said, "You're saying to yourself, 'She's got it made, for chrissake. What right does she have to be dissatisfied with anything?' Right?"

"Maybe a tiny bit, yeah." She let me take her hand regardless. She needed the contact. The missing ten years settled between us to fog the issue. I was resentful, yes. Did I want to help her? Same answer. When I guiltily tried to pull back my hand she kept hold of it. It made me feel forgiven; absolved, almost.

"In science class, in eighth grade, they taught us that when you smell



something, your nose is actually drawing in tiny molecular bits of whatever it is you're smelling. Particles."

"Which means you clamped both hands over your mouth and nose whenever you passed a dog turd on the sidewalk after school, am I right?" My prescription for sticky emotional situations is rigid: Always—always joke your way out.

Her smile came and went. "The idea stuck in my head. If you smelled something long enough, it would run out of molecules and poof—it wouldn't exist anymore."

"Uh-huh, if you stood around sniffing for a couple of eons." Fortunately, I'd forgotten most of the junk with which school had tried to clog my head. About hard science I knew squat, like math. But I did know that there were billions or trillions of molecules in any given object.

"My point is that each one of us only has so much to give." She cleared her throat, almost as though it hurt

her, and pressed valiantly onward. "What if you were to run out of pieces all of a sudden?"

"Happens all the time," I said airily. "That's what a nervous breakdown is. Entertainers who can't give their audiences an ounce more, collapse onstage. Corporate guys get physically ill and can't go near a meeting room. People exceed their operational limits ... and you're in one of the most high-pressure professions there is."

"No." She was shaking her head to prevent me from clouding her train of thought. "I mean run out of pieces literally. Suppose every photo of me ever taken was an infinitesimal piece? Every magazine ad, every negative, every frame of motion picture film—another tiny molecule of me, stolen away to feed an audience that is never satiated. And when someone is fully consumed—vampirized—they move on, still hungry, to pick their next victim by making him or her a star. That's why they're called consumers."

I looked up from the muddy lees in my cup just in time to see the passing lighthouse beam blank the ghost of her reflection from the windowpanes. Just like her smile, it came and went.

Her voice had downshifted into the husky and quavering register of confession. Now I was really uncomfortable. "I know there are celebrities who've had their picture taken two million more times than I have. But maybe they can afford it." She stretched across the bed to place her head on my thigh and hug my waist, connecting herself. "Maybe some of us don't have so many pieces ..."

I held her while the storm rallied for a renewed assault. My modest but brave beam of lamplight chopped through it. She did not grimace, or redden, or sob; her tears just began spilling out, coursing down in perfect wet lines to darken my pantleg.

Did I want to help her?

She feared that consumers wanted so much of her that pretty soon there would be nothing left to consume. And Claudia Katz no longer existed, except in my head. I'd fallen in love with her, become addicted to her ... and now she was clinging to me because Tasha Vode was almost used up, and after that, if there was no Claudia, there was nothing. She had got brought her exhaustion home to my stoop to prove she could still jerk my leash after ten years. She had done it because the so-called friends who had gorged themselves on her personality were now nodding and

RED LIGHT

clucking about celebrity lifestyles and answering their machines and juggling in new appointments to replace her as the undertow dragged her away to oblivion.

I stroked her hair until it was all out of her face. The tears dried while the seastorm churned. She snoozed, curled up, her face at peace, and I gently disengaged. Then, with a zealot's devotion toward proving her fears were all in her imagination, I went downstairs to load up one of my Nikons.

I asked her how she felt the next morning. When she said terrific, I spilled the beans.

"You what—?"

"I repeat for clarity: I took pictures of you while you were asleep. Over a hundred exposures of you wound up in my dark blue sheets, sleeping through a gale. And guess what—you're still among the living this morning." I refilled her coffee cup and used my tongs to pluck croissants out of the warmer.

She cut lose a capacious sigh, but put her protests on hold. "Don't do that again. Or you'll lose me."

I wasn't sure whether she meant she'd fade to nothingness on the spot, or stomp out if I defied her superstitions a second time. "You slept like a stone, love. Barely changed position all night." My ego was begging to be told that our mattress gymnastics had put her under, but when I saw the care she took to lift her coffee cup with both hands, I knew better.

"Look at this shit," she said with disgust. "I can barely hold up my head, let alone my coffee. I'm slouching. Models aren't supposed to slouch, for chrissake." She forced her sitting posture straight and smiled weakly. Her voice was a bit hoarse this morning, almost clogged.

"Hey, lady—slouch away." Worry stabbed at my insides while I tried to sound expansive and confident. "Do what thou wilt. Sleep all day if that's your pleasure. Just wait till you discover what I've learned to cook in the last ten years. Real salads. Stuff you have to saute'. Food with wine in it. I can artistically dish up all the squares you require. Loaf on the

beach; read my library. I have said it; it is good." I watched a glint of happiness try to burn away the caution in her eyes. She did so want to believe me. "And no more photographs. Promise. Anybody who tries has gotta shoot through yours truly."

She brightened at that. I'd gotten the reaction I wanted from her. It was the challenge-and-reward game. And goddamned if that tiny acid-drop of

*"Don't you see?
You're the only
one who ever
gave anything
back, who can
replace what the
others have
taken." I tried to
ignore the
numberless black
canisters of film
that beckoned me
from the room
with the red light.*

doubt didn't settle into my brain, sizzling—what if what if what if.

What if I was playing it safe because she might be right?

"I don't want to see those pictures," she said. "Don't even develop them."

"I'll toss 'em in the woodstove right now, if that's what you'd like." I'd made my point.

She gave a theatrical shudder. "Don't burn them. That's too much like a horror story I read once. I might shuffle off the coil along with my own pictures."

The rolls of film were lined up on my miscellaneous shelf downstairs, in the darkroom, the room with the red lightbulbs. Expose the film to anything but that mellow, crimson glow and it blanked into silver nitrate nothingness. The rolls could stay down there, sealed into their little black plastic vials. Forever, if that's what she wanted.

She kept watch on the sea while we destroyed our Continental break-

fast. "I thought maybe we could brave the overcast later, and drive down past Point Pitt for dinner," I said. "Steaks, salads and a bottle or two of Cabernet. If anybody asks whether you're Tasha Vode, just blink and say, 'Who?'"

The life had surged back in to her expression. "Maybe. Or maybe seafood. But I want you to do something for me, first."

"Your wish . . ."

"Don't you have any work to do today?"

Who were we kidding? I think we both knew I'd do almost anything she asked. "Nothing that can't wait."

"Then carry me back up to the bedroom."

My narrow little stairway was a tight shot, but we negotiated it successfully after a mild bump or two. Our robes got in the way, so we left them crumpled on the stairs about halfway up.

Her need for contact was vital.

Outside the bedroom window, it got dark. I did not notice. All I could see was her.

Her eyes were capable of a breath-catching syllabary of expressions, and I felt my own eyes become lenses, trying to record them. I stopped being friend or lover to be a camera, to try and trap what it was about her that made strangers hear those jungle drums. There were thousands, maybe millions of men out there who fantasized being inside her the way I was, who played my role and spoke my half of the dialogue whenever they passed a newsstand. Their wanting never ceased.

Her eyes told me she knew what I was up to. They did not approve.

Hers was one of the few callings that made you a veteran before puberty was left behind. If you lucked out, it could make you wealthy while still a child; if you weren't so lucky it could leave you a burned out has-been before you graduated high school. The attrition rate was worse than that for professional athletes, who could at least fall back on commercials for razors and lite beer when middle age called them out. But she did not seem the sort of human being who could relish the living death of celebrity game shows. Staying beautiful had been an unending war; each touchup a skirmish that stole away another ir-reclaimable chunk of time. Doing it for ten years, and staying the best, had been draining. Her outside was being used up. Her hipbones felt like

flint arrowheads beneath soft tissue paper.

Her hand slid down and felt the cingulum cinched drawstring tight above my balls. Comprehension dawned in her eyes, followed by that strange tolerance of hers for my various idiocies. I can't relate the exact sequence (to come was, for me, a necessary agony by now), but I was almost certain that her rapidfire contractions began the instant she slipped the knot of the cingulum. Unbound, I offloaded lavishly. Her fingers whitened with pressure on my shoulders, then relaxed, reddening with blood. I watched the pupils of those warm Arctic eyes expand hotly in the dimness as she took what was mine. Until that moment, her own orgasms had seemed insubstantial somehow. Disconnected from her. Spasms of her equipment more than sparky showers in her brain. Her breath had barely raised condensation on my skin. Now she came into focus, filled, flushed, and radiating heat.

After holding me for a lapse of time impossible to measure, she said, "Don't try to impress. You're not performing with a capital P." Her eyes saw that I had been intimidated by the imagined skills of her past decade of lovers, and thus the girdle cord trick. Stupid. "Don't you see? You're the only one who ever gave anything back."

"Tasha, you don't really believe that—"

"Try Claudia." It was not a command but a gentle urging. But it, too, was vital. "You're the only one who can give me back some of myself; replace what the others have taken. Give me more." Her reverent tone bordered on love—the word I could rarely force myself to speak, even frivolously.

Who better to give her back some of herself? I was a goddamn repository of her identity. With other women I had never bothered worrying, and so had never been befuddled as I was now. I'd made love to Claudia, not the exterior self that the rest of the world was busy eating. And now she was steering.

I gave her back to herself; her eyes said so, her voice said so, and I tried to hush the voice in my head that said I was not being compensated for this drain. I tried to ignore the numberless black cannisters of film that beckoned me from the room with the red light. And later, past midnight, when the storm thundered in, I carefully took twice what I had given

her. No matter how much we have, as Nicole the waitress would say, we always want more.

"Skull full of sparrow shit," she said the following day, as we bumped knees and elbows trying to dress for dinner. "Gorgeous but ditzy. Vacuous. Vapid. Pampered. Transient values. A real spoiled-rotten—"

"I think I get the stereotype," I said. "You're just not stupid enough to



be happy as a model anymore, right?"

"Ex-model." She watched the sea bounce back the glare of late afternoon. "You don't believe me, do you?"

"What I believe scares the crap out of me." I tried to veneer what I said with good humor, to defang my fears. "I believe, for example, that you might be a ghost. And ghosts never stay."

She wagged her eyebrows. "I could haunt your lighthouse. Or maybe I'm just your wish-fulfillment."

"Don't laugh. I've often thought that I'm not really earning a living as a photographer." Merely speaking that last word caused the slightest hesitation in the natural flow of her movements; she was *that* sensitized to it. "I'm not really sleeping with Tas...uh, Claudia Katz." She caught that slip, too, but forgave it. "Actually, I'm really a dirtbag litter basket picker up in the Mission. And all of this is a hallucinatory fantasy I invented while loitering near a magazine rack with Tasha Vode's picture at hand, hm?"

"Ack," she said with mock horror. "You're one of *them*. The pod-folk."

"Are we gone, or what?"

She stepped back from the mirror, inside of a bulky, deep-blue ski sweater with maroon patterning, soft boots of grey suede, and black slacks so tight they made my groin ache. Her eyes filled up with me, and they were the aquamarine color of the sunlit ocean outside. "We're gone," she said, and led the way down the stairs.

I followed, thinking that when she left me again I'd at least have those hundreds of photographs of her in my bed. Ghosts never stay.

Outside there was a son of a bitch, and an asshole.

The son of a bitch was crouched in ambush right next to my front door. His partner, the asshole, was leaning on my XLS, getting cloudy fingerprints all over the front fender. I had backed out the front door, to lock it, and heard his voice talking, before anything else.

"Miss Vode, do you have any comment on your abrupt—"

Tash—Claudia—started to scream.

I turned as she recoiled and grabbed my hand. I saw the asshole. Any humanity he might have claimed was obliterated by the vision of a huge, green check for an exclusive article that lit up his eyes. A pod man. Someone had recognized us in the restaurant last night, and sent him to ambush us in the name of the public's right to know. He brandished a huge audio microphone at us as though it was a scepter of power. It had a red foam windscreen and looked like a phallic lollipop.

Her scream sliced his question neatly off. She scrambled backward, hair flying, trying to interpose me between herself and the enemy, clawing at her head, crushing her eyes shut and screaming. That sound filled my veins with liquid nitrogen.

The son of a bitch was behind us. From the instant we had stepped into the sunlight, he'd had us nailed in his viewfinder. The video rig into which he was harnessed ground silently away; the red bubble light over the lens hood was on.

And Tasha screamed.

Maybe she jerked her hand away, maybe I let it go, but her grip went foggy in mine as I launched myself at the cameraman, eating up the distance between us like a barracuda. Only once in my whole life had I ever hit a man in anger, and now I doubled my own personal best by delivering a

RED LIGHT

roundhouse punch right into the black glass maw of his lens, filling his face up with his own camera, breaking his nose, two front teeth, and the three middle fingers of my fist. He faded to black and went down like a medieval knight trapped by the weight of his own armor. I swarmed over him and used my good hand to rip out his electronic heart, wrestling away portacams, tape and all. Cables shredded like torn ligaments and shiny tape viscera trailed as I heaved it, spinning, over the pier rail and into a sea the same color as Tasha's eyes. The red light expired.

Her scream ... wasn't. There was a sound of pain as translucent as rice paper, thin as a flake of mica, drowned out by the roar of water meeting beach.

By the time I cranked my head around—two dozen slow-motion shots, easy—neither of her was there anymore. I thought I saw her eyes, in Arctic-cold afterburn, winking out last.

"Did you see—?"

"You're trespassing!" bellowed Dickie Barnhardt, wobbling toward the asshole with his side-to-side Popeye gait, pressed flat and pissed off. The asshole's face was flash-frozen into a bloodless bas-relief of shock and disbelief. His mouth hung slack, showing off a lot of expensive fillings. His mike lay forgotten at his feet.

"Did you see ... did ... she just ..."

Dickie bounced his ashwood walking stick off the asshole's forehead, and he joined his fallen mike in a boneless tumble on the planks of the pier. Dickie's face was alight with a bizarre expression that said it had been quite awhile since he'd found a good excuse to raise physical mayhem, and he was proud of his forthright defense of tenant and territory. "You okay?" he said, squinting at me and spying the fresh blood on my hand.

"Dickie, did you see Tasha?" My own voice was switching in and out. My throat constricted. My unbroken hand closed on empty space. Too late.

He grinned a seaworthy grin at me and nudged the unconscious idiot at his feet, who remained slack.

"Who's Tasha, son?"

I drink my coffee left-handed, and the cast mummifying my right hand gives me something to stare at contemplatively.

I think most often of that videotape, decomposing down there among the sand sharks and the jellyfish that sometimes bob to the surface near Dickie's pier. I think that the tiny bit of footage recorded by that poor, busted-up son-of-a-bitch cameraman would not have mattered one damn, if I hadn't shot so much film of Tasha to prove she had nothing to fear. So many pieces. I pushed her right to the edge, cannibalizing her in the name of love.

The black plastic cans of film are still on the shelf down in my darkroom, lined up like inquisitors already convinced of my guilt. The thought of dunking that film in developer makes me want to stick a gun in my ear and pull the trigger, twice if I had the time.

Then I consider another way out, and wonder how long it would take me to catch up with her; how many pieces I have.

I never cried much before. Now the tears unload at the least provocation. It's sloppy, and messy, and unprofessional, and I hate it. It makes Nicole stare at me the way the street bum did, like I've tipped over into psycholand.

When she makes her rounds to fill my cup, she watches me. The wariness in her eyes is new. She sees my notice dip from her eyes to her sumptuous chest and back, in a guilty but unalterable ritual. I force a smile for her, gamely, but it stays pasted across my face a beat too long, insisting too urgently that everything is okay. She doesn't ask. I wave my unbroken hand over my cup to indicate *no more*, and Nicole tilts her head with a queer, new expression—as though this white boy is trying to trick her. But she knows better. She always has. ■



HOTEL

(continued from page 66)

coat that showed off her slim waist.

Our afternoon together was wholly delightful. Unlike most of my ships that pass in the night, Mary Ward had more to do in London than "seeing the sights." She had her own specific agenda. All I had to do was tag along with her and be entertaining. I did insist that we eat well at my expense, explaining that I had enjoyed a windfall in my morning meeting. My London agent had sold English rights to two of my books, which meant several thousand more dollars in the next few months with no work on my part. After a few years, such minor inventions become instinctive.

We visited Samuel Johnson's house in Gough Square, and then spent several happy hours wandering around Southwark and Streatham, for reasons that were obscure to me but presumably sufficient to Mary. Dinner in the Strand was followed by a long and leisurely walk through theaterland.

There was one more tricky point to be negotiated, and it is one that can never be planned in advance. Somehow the conversation must turn to very personal relationships—and Mary, not I, had to be the one to tilt it that way. No one can talk about sex without thinking about it, and the step from thought to deed is not a long one. But she must not suspect contrivance on my part.

One might say, "That is allowing everything to depend on chance." I would answer by quoting Pasteur, "Chance favors the prepared mind."

My preparation was simple. I arranged that our walk back to the hotel would take us along the southern part of Tottenham Court Road. This area once had good restaurants and varied retail stores for anything from home wine-making to used books, but within the past fifteen years the character has changed. Now one seems to find only shops that sell sexual appliances.

Mary had never seen anything like it. We dawdled along past the window displays, everything from inflatable dolls ("complete with all working parts," promised the advertisement) to double-ended dildoes and the ambitiously named "Gargantua Cream."

Mary stared with fascination and without comment, but the condoms bearing a picture of Donald Duck were too much for her. She grabbed my arm and started laughing. "They sure don't sell those in Disneyland," she said. "Who would buy things like that?"

I shrugged. "Tourists? They want to show the folks back home what London is like."

"But could you imagine using one of those without laughing?" And when I did not answer, she went on: "I mean, sex is supposed to be fun, but it's not supposed to be funny."

We went on, arm-in-arm. Mary's mind was on the right subject. I could feel the electrical charge between us steadily building. We walked and

*I heard voices.
Two gray-clad
figures stood
outside my room.
Both moved with
the same gait, an
odd gliding
movement that
ended at the hips
without involving
the upper body.
For the first time, I
felt frightened.*

talked of lovemaking and the human condition. When we arrived back at the hotel and took our separate keys, I did not say anything to Mary, but simply followed to her room on the floor below mine. She unlocked the door and went in. Then she turned and looked at me uncertainly. I stepped inside and closed the door without speaking.

That was at ten o'clock. At four-thirty I got up and dressed, all except my shoes, by the light of the street-lamp outside the window. Mary was sleeping soundly with a sheet and blanket covering her to her chin. She had been everything that I hoped she might be, warm and generous and passionate. If her physical responses were a reliable guide, I had been no

less for her. I leaned down and kissed her gently on the forehead, then went to the door. The corridor outside was dim-lit and deserted. I quietly left the room, pulling the door closed behind me.

Carrying my shoes under my arm, I walked to the dark stairs and went up one flight. Although I had no particular reason to move quietly, the lateness of the hour and the stillness of the hotel encouraged it. And it was the silence of my advance that allowed me to hear soft voices ahead of me.

I was physically tired, but fully alert mentally. I stopped in the shadow of the stairs and looked out along the corridor. Two gray-clad figures stood outside my room. While I watched, one of them stealthily inserted a key in my lock and eased open the door. As he sneaked inside, I saw that he was holding a short cylinder as thick as my wrist in one hand, and a long, gleaming needle-thin spike in the other. His companion stayed in the corridor. He was holding a dark bundle that looked like three empty sacks of black plastic.

It was the ferret-faces again. The quiet efficiency of their movements killed any urge on my part to step forward and demand explanations. I stood hidden by the stairwell, held my breath, and waited. After a few seconds the first man appeared quickly from my room. There was a breathy exchange between the two of them, too low in volume for me to make out any words (or even a language). Then they went loping away from me, heading for a door at the end of the corridor. They both moved with the same gait, an odd gliding movement that ended at the hips without involving the upper body. For the first time, I felt frightened.

I knew they would be coming back—but which way would they go? I dared not remain on the stairs, going up or down. I dared not go to the hotel lobby, where their brother would probably be on duty. Where would I be safe? Finally I took a deep breath and ran silently along the corridor and into my room. I left the door as I found it, partly open, and crawled under my bed.

Two minutes later they were back. I heard a sibilant whisper of voices outside, and one of the pair stepped into the room again. For a second there was the same pungent smell in the air, cardamom and cummin. Then he left, and the door was closed from outside. I heard a shuffle of feet heading back to the stairs.

I was out from under the bed in a second. As I opened the door I felt a horrible foreboding, but my curiosity was irresistible. I had to know if I were right. Still in my stockinged feet, I moved silently along to the door at the end farthest from the stairs. I opened it and went through.

It's hard to say what I had been expecting, but the reality looked normal enough. I seemed to be in a part of the hotel kitchen. There was a line of stainless-steel containers—boilers, or steamers—along the left-hand wall and two work benches over on the right. The place was spotlessly clean. Knives, graters, choppers, peelers and mashers were all hanging neatly in their correct places from hooks above the benches. Stacked boxes of plastic sacks sat under one of the benches, and beneath the other was a set of big nested metal bowls. A long, low refrigerator and freezer occupied the far wall. I opened the freezer door and found the interior well-stocked and neatly arranged. That was all I had time for. Within thirty seconds of leaving my room, I was heading back to it. Two minutes later I had put on my shoes, collected my belongings, and packed both cases.

One problem remained. The only way I knew out of the hotel lay through the front door, and that door was guarded by the dark-skinned receptionist. I might get as far as the lounge and the telephone booth unobserved, but after that I would certainly be noticed. After what I had seen of the two men outside my room, I wanted them to believe that I was nowhere in the hotel.

After a few seconds of desperate thought, I quietly descended to the floor above the lobby and set my cases down. I took the paper bags from the books I had bought in the morning, and placed them on the floor underneath a smoke detector. On top of them I put my woolen scarf. I lit the paper with a match, then moved with my cases as quickly and quietly as I could to the shelter of the phone booth.

It took so long that I thought the flame must have gone out without even singeing the wool. Finally a wavering electronic whine sounded from the floor above. Ten seconds more, and two men came hurrying from the front of the hotel and headed up the stairs.

I would have felt much more comfortable had there been three of them. However, I had to assume that the third must be off somewhere sleep-

ing. Grabbing my cases, I went for the front door of the hotel at a dead run, opened it, and rushed out into the pre-dawn grayness of London in November. I took a glance into the reception area as I passed, and it was deserted.

That was a four forty-five. Five minutes later, I was in a taxi, heading for Terminal Two at Heathrow. My flight out was not until five in the afternoon, but no matter. I was willing to endure a full day at the terminal, even though I know of few facilities less designed for human comfort than a modern airport.

I am there now, sitting in the departure lounge. Reviewing my actions, I am more than ever convinced that they were wholly appropriate. Had I



not remained away from my room for most of the night and then at once fled that hotel, I am convinced that I would have suffered the same fate as the unfortunate "John Simpson."

Here is the world as I see it.

I begin with the existence of a group of men driven by certain sexual needs and hungers. It is not necessary either to defend or condemn us, but merely say that we exist and that there are hungers, with their own force and urgencies.

Our "prey," to pursue the analogy of hunger further, are unaccompanied women. A fine place to find the quarry is in the small hotels of central London. We generally offer no harm, we predators, to those we hunt, but we shun any idea of a more perma-

nent relationship with our partners. As a result, we practice anonymity. I have not used my real name and address in ten years of hotel visits, and I never tell my colleagues, friends, and business acquaintances where I will be staying. For a short period of time I become "Bill Rivers," or "Alan Johnson," or "John Simpson." I believe that my behavior represents the hunter's rule, rather than the exception.

So far, this is either known fact, or inference based on broad experience. Now let me conjecture.

We are predators, I and the John Simpsons of the world; but we are also prey. Others have learned our habits and our habitats. We are easy to identify, and now our hunting ground has become our trap. The hotels lie in wait for the men who seek anonymity, who stay only one or two days, and who actively pursue unaccompanied women. If we disappear, no one knows where or when. And we are valuable commodities. To hide our identities, we use neither checks nor credit cards. We carry large amounts of cash.

They want our money. That is the obvious and tolerable explanation of my experience in the hotels and of John Simpson's disappearance. I would like to believe it, but I cannot. I suspect worse things.

Our flight will be called any minute now. I should feel safe, but my eyes turn again and again to the entry point for arrival of late passengers. The cases that were searched in the hotel room contained my passport, home address, and plane tickets. They know who I am, where I went, where I am going. What will I do, I wonder, should a lean, vulpine figure come leaping toward me through the embarkation barrier and reach out those skinny golden-haired arms?

I do not know, but I cannot forget two things. That refrigerator and freezer were stocked entirely with meat, yet the only meal ever served to guests was breakfast. And the expression on those feral, dim-lit faces outside my hotel room was not greed. It was hunger.

When humans moved from woods to cities, those who preyed on us moved too. They are with us still, living their secret life in the small hotels, in the dingy recesses of our society.

Their numbers are small, and in the large sense they do not represent a threat to humanity. But it is no pleasant thing to learn that in the great catalogue of Nature's predators, I am not in first place. ■

Fractures

(continued from page 43)

hadn't been back to Canyons since she and her mother left after her father's funeral. Perhaps she wanted to go back after all this time because a breakthrough was imminent.

I slid out of bed and quietly packed for our trip. I woke them up before dawn. At the lavish breakfast I had prepared, all three took turns coming out. Each seemed excited about the trip.

On the road, Lina was her usual self again, laughing and cuddling, pointing out things on 101 that caught her attention. The highway twisted around the coast. Midday, Teresa sat next to me watching the water. The coast became more rugged and jagged, with enormous rocks jutting out of the water. In the afternoon, the air grew cooler and damp and the highway wove into dark green-black forests where moss hung from the branches like spider webs in an empty house. When the trees parted, foamy waves crashed against the rock and beaches.

In the late afternoon, Nick was sitting next to me.

"It smells like home," he said, watching the trees go by.

Two hours later we pulled into Canyons. "It's so different," Nick said. "The only thing I recognize is the smell."

I found a motel on the road near the beach and checked us in. After we unpacked our clothes, Teresa was in charge.

She slipped on her jacket and waded to me, uncharacteristically impatient.

"Come on," she said. "I want to show you my old house."

Most of the homes had the dilapidated look of beach houses, bent from the constant wind, exteriors streaked with rust and moss. Teresa's house was on a bluff overlooking the ocean. I slowed the car so she could look at it.

"That was my room up to the right," she said. "It's a lot bigger than I remember. Isn't it supposed to look smaller because I'm older?" She laughed and I smiled. "It does look older and it's a different color. I wonder who lives in there now?"

"Do you want to go inside?"

"No," she said. "Let's go to the

ruins instead."

"The ruins?"

"Just turn the car around and drive about a mile," she said.

I drove until Teresa told me to stop. Then I pulled the car off to the side of the road and we walked to a bluff that had been windswept clear of grass; the ruddy earth had a sheen to it.

"Where are the ruins?" I asked, seeing nothing but dirt.

"This is all part of the ruins," she said, pulling her coat close around her and turning from the icy northern wind. "There used to be lots of buildings here. It was like the Barbary Coast, only not as famous. People came out of the wildness and from

*The roof was
afame. The
sudden heat was
tremendous. I
heard screams,
the sounds of
music dying
away. The night
sky was red,
melting all that
was real.*

towns all over on the weekends. There were dances and parties."

I followed as she walked around. The land dipped. We stood looking down at a rectangular foundation. Muddy water and sand lay in one end of it.

"This was a pool," she said. "Over there, if we were a little closer, you could see a brick structure on the hill; that's where they pumped up sea water and then heated it for the pool."

"What happened to everything?"

"It all burned to the ground in 1936 and they never rebuilt. Here, look." She kicked at the ground. Shards of glass were everywhere, embedded in the ground. "This is where the dance hall was, right next to the pool. There are charred beams around here, too, somewhere, just the ends of them sticking out of the ground." She looked about her. "It doesn't look like much now, but at night it's magical. Some people believe it's haunted. The moon and stars and

fog reshape everything, and it's easy to imagine what it was like. My friends and I used to come here at night and hold séances." She smiled. I wondered what Lina would think of the ruins.

"I came here the night my dad died. I'd forgotten that," she murmured. "We should come back here when it's dark, Adam. You'd really see what it was like."

"Sure, we'll come out," I said. "Perhaps it'll be warmer at night."

"You're cold?" she asked, rubbing my arms. "Let's go inland a bit then. I've had enough for now."

Nick came out as we sat in a restaurant overlooking the ocean. The sun was just setting, shadowing the beach in shades of pink and purple. The sand grayed, and I could barely make out the shapes of pelicans standing by a small stream running into the ocean. Nick stared out the window.

"Is it as you remember it?" I asked.

He shook his head. "It's all different. It can't be the right place."

"This is Canyons," I said, wishing Lina would come out and share the sunset with me.

"I thought if we came back here . . ." he began. "I thought I could find Laura again." He picked up his fork and pushed his salad around with it. "But this is not the place." He closed his eyes. "I don't want to be here."

"Nick," I touched his hand. He opened his eyes and Lina was there.

"Where are we?"

"In a restaurant in Canyons," I said.

"Canyons?" She looked out the window. The sun was gone and the beach was hazy; only the curling whites of waves could be seen.

"Do you recognize it?"

"Not from here," she answered.

"When we're finished, I'll show you around."

As we drove through the town, Lina sat against the door, reminding me of Teresa. She turned to me often and smiled nervously.

"I feel funny," she said. "I don't know this place."

I took her by Teresa's old school and house. Then I drove past the ruins.

"I guess there was a dance hall here and a heated swimming pool," I told her, stopping the car.

I looked over at her. She was shivering slightly. The day was gray-ing into the black and her features

were indistinct.

"Can we go back to our room?" she asked. "I'm tired." I smiled. "Not used to being around this time of night, eh?"

"I guess not."

I reached over and embraced her. She held on to me tightly. "I wish you could be around always," I whispered. She squeezed me and then pulled away. There were tears in her eyes.

"What's wrong, Babe?"

She turned her face to the window.

"It's just not what I expected," she said.

I remembered what Nick had said about expecting to find Laura; perhaps Lina thought she would find Russell, too. I breathed deeply, telling myself it was stupid to be jealous. Obviously, by coming home, they all thought they'd find what they had lost: Teresa's father. But he was dead. Maybe now they would all realize it. If his death was accepted, perhaps the pieces could be put together again into one person.

"I'll take you back now," I said.

Someone shook me awake. In the darkness I couldn't tell how they held her body, so I didn't know who it was.

"Let's go now," they whispered.

"Where?"

"To the ruins."

"What time is it?"

"I'm not sure. After midnight."

After midnight? The anniversary of their father's death. I got out of bed quickly and dressed.

The ride was short. I parked the car and got out, hurrying to keep up with Lina/Nick/Tess.

The wind had died. Overhead, a full moon sharpened the shadows. Below, the ocean moved, its waves like snakes sliding across the sand. A mist settled around the ruins. Tess was right; it was different. I could almost imagine a dance hall.

"See." It was Tess. "Anything could happen here."

Where the wind had eroded the earth, the red ground looked alien, a Martian landscape at night.

"I felt safe here," she said. "This place gave most people the creeps. But I always liked it."

Something shifted and everything was slightly different. The mist moved, more like thick smoke than fog. It shaped itself into a building.

"Tess, do you see that?"

"I know this place," Lina.

I blinked hard. Lina moved closer to the apparition. When I put my

hand on her arm, she shook me away.

"I know this place," she said again.

The image of the hall wavered, and then two people were inside dancing. I squinted. Lina stopped. I moved closer until I was standing at what would have been a wall, but there wasn't one. It was only mist that seemed to swirl around the dancers, moving to form other people and then floating away again, never solidifying. The two dancers were clear, the woman dressed in an apricot-colored dress, the man in a dark suit. The woman stopped to show the man a step. I stopped breathing. I knew her smile, her walk, the toss of her head: they were all Lina's movements.



I touched Lina's arm to reassure myself she was there.

"Russell," Lina whispered, staring at the man.

The couple began dancing again. The other shapes moved around them. Lina glanced up at the sky. I followed her gaze.

The mist roof was aflame. The dance hall was burning again, just as it had in 1936. I stepped away and pulled Lina with me.

"No!" It was Nick. He pried my fingers from his arm. The dancing couple was smiling, gazing intently at one another. The man. I knew him, too. I looked back at Nick.

"Laura!" he called.

Laura? Russell? What was happening? He started to run toward them. I jumped in his path and put my arms around him to hold him still.

"Russell!" Lina screamed.

The roof cracked. Lina tore loose from me and ran for the building. I leaped and caught her in the mist

wall. The sudden heat was tremendous. I heard screams, the sounds of music dying away; smoke seemed to fill my lungs. Then there was a noise—like air being sucked from a tube, or from Lina's body, and then she went limp in my arms. I pulled her away from the building. The couple looked up. The man swore and took the woman's hand. They ran toward us.

"They're gone," Tess whispered. "Really gone."

I didn't know what she meant; I could still see them coming through the mist. I looked at her and then back at the couple and something clicked into place and I understood. Lina and Nick were no longer a part of Teresa. They were in the dance hall, becoming the people they had once been. Laura and Russell, the long-lost lovers.

The dance hall was burning down around them.

"Oh God!" I cried rushing toward the building.

Lina/Laura stumbled. Russell/Nick pulled her up. They were like two bright lights amidst the rushing white shadows. The roof creaked. Tess grabbed me. The roof started to fall. Lina/Laura looked at me an instant before the ceiling fell.

"Lina!" I screamed.

The night sky was red, melting all that was real.

And then the mist cleared. Teresa and I were standing on the empty bluff on a starlit night. I ran around the place where the hall had been.

"It's gone, Adam," Teresa said. "They're gone."

I shook my head. Teresa held me still.

"I remember now," she said. "The same thing happened that night. I came here after I found out my father was dead. I was so upset, and when the dance hall appeared, I didn't really know what I was seeing—I still don't. The woman was showing the man how to dance, and then they looked like they were in trouble. I wanted to help, I guess. I ran toward them and they ran to me. I felt something peculiar, like air passing through me, or something. Then the dance hall disappeared. Something must have happened as we ran toward each other. We somehow got mixed up in one another. Ghosts?"

"Now they're gone. It's over! It can be just you and me now."

I looked down at her and wanted to scream. She gazed steadily at me.

"So I have been right all this

Fractures

time," she said, letting me go. "You do only love her."

"We can get her back," I said.

"She's dead," Teresa said. "She was just a ghost, someone who died in the fire."

"No, they weren't ghosts. Didn't you feel the fire, hear the music, see them clearly? They were *real*, Tess. I don't know how, but they were. Maybe there is some sort of connection here between the past and the present. Maybe we were looking into the past. Twelve years ago Lina and Nick came out of the past—"

"—and invaded my body? I don't care what the explanation is," Teresa said. "I'm just grateful it's over."

"We can come back another night," I said. "We could catch Lina before she dies, bring her back here."

"No! I won't go through that again. Twelve years of living only a few hours a day."

I took her by the shoulders. "But this time you would know what was happening! You'd know you weren't crazy."

"I would still be sharing my life, and I would still know you'd rather be with her." She pulled away.

"You saved her once," I said. "If there's a chance of saving her life again, won't you try? You've lived with her for twelve years. Don't you feel anything for her?"

"You've lived with them; I don't know them. I do know they are responsible for large portions of my life being gone. And if you care so much about *them* how come you only mention Lina? Don't you care what happens to Nick? I won't do it, Adam. You can have me, but only me."

She turned and ran to the car. I sank onto the ground and put my head in my hands.

The next day we walked around town. Teresa was happy. As I watched her, I realized I had never really seen her happy before. I tried to be pleasant, but I was thinking of the night before, trying to figure out a way to get Lina back. We stopped at the historical museum. Teresa hurried through the exhibit of the fire. I stopped and looked at old pictures of the dance hall. It was just as I had

seen it the last night before it burned. I flipped through an old newspaper describing the fire. Although the fire had swept the town, only three people had died, an old man who wouldn't leave his house and two people in the dance hall. I felt the room close in on me as I read their names: Laura and Russell Myers. They had been married the morning of the fire. Their faces looked out from the picture, Nick's grin and Lina's smile. I gently touched the faded photo, and then I left the museum.

The day passed slowly. That night, Tess made love to me far more passionately than she ever had before. I closed my eyes, and she kissed the tears away.

The mist gathered. A seagull screamed. Then they were there, dancing together, holding each other closely. "Lina!" I called, running toward them.

Just before midnight I slipped out of bed and left the room quietly and drove to the ruins. I stood on the bluff hoping the dance hall would appear again, hoping desperately that the burning of the dance hall was a nightly ritual that I could somehow tap into again.

The mist gathered. A seagull screamed. I would get Lina back, I told myself. I would go into the dance hall and get her out before the ceiling caved in. Somehow I would save her.

The mist shaped itself into the hall. I pleaded out loud for Lina to come back. Then they were there, Lina and Nick, dancing together, holding each other closely. "Lina!" I called, running toward them. The mist eddied. I looked around. I was standing in shadow and mist, nothing else. When I moved back I could see the hall and the couple dancing. I tried getting inside again and again, but nothing happened. Then I remembered what Teresa had said: it had happened

exactly the same both times. She had run toward the dance hall and into the mist at a particular time. Perhaps there were only a few minutes when the two worlds were accessible to one another. That's why Lina could be standing next to me and watching herself at the same time: in the past, she had not yet plunged into our time.

I watched them. Lina stopped to show Nick a step. I moved closer to the wall. Now I could smell smoke. Fire burned. I leaned into the wall. People screamed. The roof creaked. Nick and Lina looked up and then grasped hands and raced toward me, not seeing me; I could see them and their determined, terrified faces: they were not going to let this happen to them. I ran to them, my arms outstretched. "This way!" I cried. We passed through one another, and I felt a comforting shiver run down my back, as if Lina had gently touched my spine with the tip of her finger.

I stepped back and the roof fell. Then I screamed into the empty mist.

I opened my eyes. Morning light painted the breakfast nook in smoky shades of blue. I held a croissant in my hand. Teresa sat across from me, laughing. Her laughter died gradually into a smile as she realized I was now in charge.

"Hello, Adam," she said, tearing her roll in half and buttering it. "Nick—I mean Russell—was just telling me a funny story."

I looked down at my plate. Russell again. Two months ago she had been so in love with me. That was before she met Russell/Nick.

"How is Lina?" I asked.

"Laura is fine," she said. "She's finally getting accustomed to the new body, your body." She smiled slightly. "She even taught me to dance yesterday, and then Nick and I danced all night."

Lina. If only I could unlock my mind and reach her. If only Teresa could see me again when she looked at me.

"Tess—" I began, my voice trembling.

"Finish your breakfast," she said, standing up and looking slightly annoyed. "It's a lovely day. I'll meet you outside and we can take a walk. All right, darling?"

She touched my shoulders and kissed the top of my head lightly, distractedly, as if she were thinking of something—or someone—else.

She walked outside and let the screen door slam away the light as she left.

PILGRIM

(continued from page 60)

22. DRAYTON BEDROOM NIGHT (OF DAY #3)

Kevin is packing a small suitcase on the bed as a worried, frightened Carol looks on.

CAROL

Kev, what do you expect me to say? You spend all night at work, don't even call me till the next morning, and now—

(half-beat)

What could possibly be so wrong with your project that you have to go sleep in the lab?

KEVIN

(sighs)

If I told you, you'd think I was crazy.

CAROL

(gently)

We've lived this long with each other's particular kind of craziness. I think I can stand a little more.

KEVIN

(snapping)

Dammit, Carol, it's only for—

(half-beat)

I don't know how long it's for. But it's only temporary. Until I can get this ... sorted out.

CAROL

(beat)

The project ... or us?

(quietly)

Are you leaving me, Kevin?

Confused, emotionally torn, Kevin slams shut the suitcase.

KEVIN

I don't know! I don't know anything right now!

He snaps up the suitcase, heads for the door.

KEVIN

I'll call you later. I promise.

(a beat)

I'm sorry. He exits. Off Carol's hurt, frightened expression:

CUT TO

23. CLOSE SHOT A SCRAPBOOK PAGE

A faded, cracked, browning photograph of a five-year-old girl ... Nola. Exactly as we saw her early on in the hologram.

SUSAN'S VOICE

This is Aunt Nola. When she was five years old.

24. INTERIOR GRANVILLE HOME ATTIC SUPERED OVER: DAY FOUR

Susan Granville is a young woman in her mid-twenties, standing beside an open trunk filled with dusty photo albums; Daniel stands by her side, looking with fascination at the photo.

DANIEL

(under his breath)

Amazing ... Susan turns the pages, revealing photos

of Nola as a young girl and a teenager—again, exactly as we've already seen her—as:

SUSAN

Her father was snobbish, provincial ... lost half his fortune in the stock market crash, hated the fact that he'd been brought down to the level of the masses. He and Nola had a falling out when she was in her twenties ... that's when the family lost contact with her.

DANIEL

A falling out? Over what?

We see another photograph: the sixteen-year-old Nola, just as we saw her in the previous scene, this one taken at a birthday party.

SUSAN

A man. Law student, tutoring at NYU. Her father was apologetic ... threatened to disinherit her, but Nola didn't care; she'd always felt guilty about her family's wealth.

(laughs)

Very little of it survives today. Myself, I wouldn't mind being a bit more guilty. Daniel returns the laugh. We push in on a final, yellowing photograph, this one of Nola at about twenty-five, as:

SUSAN VOICE

I think his name was ... Robert.

Robert—

MATCH CUT TO

25. INTERIOR COMPUTER LAB DAY #4 ON NOLA

Looking exactly as she appeared in the photograph.

NOLA

(wistfully)

—Goldman. He was nothing like the polo-playing underheads I grew up with ... he saw the sorry state the world was in, wanted to do something about it ...

(smiles)

And he listened to me, Kevin ... just like you do. We talked about ... everything. He wanted to ... set up a law practice for the disadvantaged ... while I got my master's in literature at Boston College.

KEVIN

What did your parents think about this?

Nola's face clouds over; her tone becomes soft, sad.

NOLA

Father ... didn't approve. Of any of it. Especially Robert.

KEVIN

Why not? Because he wasn't rich?

NOLA

(beat; then)

That, too. But mainly because he was Jewish.

Kevin is startled; the concept, to modern sensibilities, seems positively antediluvian.

KEVIN

You're kidding.

NOLA

He made it quite clear. If I married Robert, I'd be ... cut off. From him ... from Mother ... From—

Her voice catches; she is very close to tears.

NOLA

From everything. The whole family.

KEVIN

Nola, I'm sorry ...

Unthinkingly, he reaches out to take her hand ... and his hand passes right through hers. He draws back, quickly; Nola looks at him, the gulf between them more apparent than ever, and her voice when she speaks is very soft, very frightened.

NOLA

Kevin? Why—why am I here? Like this, with you?

KEVIN

(long beat; then)

That's what I've been trying to figure out, Nola.

NOLA

(trying to recall)

I feel like there's ... something I have to do ... something I have to accomplish, but I can't seem to—remember ...

(quietly)

Help me, Kevin. Please? Help me to remember?

Off Kevin's look of utter frustration:

TIME CUT TO

26. EXTERIOR GLOBAL TECHNOLOGIES SUPERED OVER: DAY FIVE

27. INTERIOR COMPUTER LAB DAY

Kevin sits eating breakfast from small fast food sacks, one of them emblazoned with a cheery, smiling anthropomorphic fried egg; Nola sits on a holographic stool in the display, her eyes glassy as she summons the memories again from her past life. She is now a woman in her mid-thirties.

NOLA

(dreamily)

... Robert and I loved the house in Cambridge ... but when I finally got pregnant, we decided to sell it and get a larger place, so—

KEVIN

(interrupts)

Pregnant? You never mentioned that before.

NOLA

(thinks, then)

I just remembered it. In an odd sort of way, Kevin, when I sit here, remembering, it's almost as though ... it's all happening for the first time.

(half-beat)

Anyway, the pregnancy came as quite a surprise. My obstetrician had said I had a slight malformation of the uterus ... warned me it might be difficult to conceive a child, but ...

KEVIN

Well, don't keep me in suspense. Was it a boy or a girl?

NOLA

(laughs)

I went into labor in the middle of writing a paper for the Poetry Review.



Kept that thing clutched in my hand all the way to the hospital? They finally pried it loose as I was being wheeled into the operating room and—

Suddenly, without warning, Nola's eyes widen, and her expression turns from one of dreamy nostalgia to one of shock and ... pain. Intense, searing pain. She cries out in agony, doubling over as her hands go to her stomach. Kevin jumps to his feet, watching helplessly as Nola slowly sinks to her knees with remembered pain

KEVIN

Nola! Nola, what's wrong?

NOLA

Oh, god! Make it stop, make it stop! Horrified, helpless, Kevin can only watch, as:

28. NEW ANGLE

Daniel enters the lab, sees though does not understand what is happening; he rushes to Kevin's side.

DANIEL

Doc, what the hell—?

KEVIN

She just ... screamed in pain and doubled over. I've never felt so helpless in my life.

29. ANGLE ON NOLA

As, all at once, the pain stops. Her face undergoes a dramatic change: shock, astonishment, and then ... sadness. And in that moment, there is a sudden maturity, a wisdom and a knowledge that was not there before. Kevin and Daniel squat by her side, concerned; Nola's tone, when she speaks, is quiet and sad.

KEVIN

Nola, what happened? Are you all right?

NOLA

(beat; then)

I ... I lost it, Kevin. I lost the baby ...

(softly)

I ... remember now ...

KEVIN

Oh, God, Nola, I'm so sorry ...

Nola shuts her eyes. Suddenly, she seems much older.

NOLA

I have to ... be by myself for a while, Kevin. Just a little while. I'll be back. I promise, I'll be back.

And with that, the holo display snaps off, startling both Kevin and Daniel.

DANIEL

I didn't know she could do that.

KEVIN

Neither did I ...

DANIEL

(looks at Kevin)

You look like hell, Doc. How much sleep are you getting?

KEVIN

Enough. Couple of hours a night. I can't afford to squander my time with her, Dan.

Something in his tone—a certain obsessive quality—disturbs Daniel.

DANIEL

C'mon. Let's get some air. I think we need to talk.

CUT TO

30. EXTERIOR PARK DAY

Kevin and Daniel walk through the park, drinking coffee from styrofoam cups.

DANIEL

Look, maybe I can spell you.

KEVIN

Not necessary, Dan. Besides, I've got more people for you to track down.

(hands him a small

notebook; quietly)

She's a ... very special person, Daniel. We've got to help her, if we can.

DANIEL

(longer beat; then)

Look ... Doc. We've never really had more than a professional relationship, so maybe this is out of line, but ... you're not getting yourself involved here, are you?

KEVIN

(short laugh)

'Involved'? With a ... a spirit?

DANIEL

Some would say that's really what we fall in love with, when we fall in love.

A soul, a spirit ...

(beat; pointedly)

She's aging ten years for every day. Doc. At this rate, she'll be ... gone ... in three or four days. What do you do then?

Kevin doesn't answer. He's afraid to. Hold on his face, unable to contemplate what Daniel's said, knowing that he must, and:

TIME CUT TO

31. EXTERIOR ROUTE 128 SUPERED OVER: DAY SEVEN

32. INTERIOR COMPUTER LAB DAY # 6

The holo display is still turned off. Kevin paces anxiously back and forth, mind racing ... and a beat later, the display suddenly snaps on again, and Nola appears. She's in her forties now; still beautiful, but a more mature beauty. Kevin, relieved, hurries to her side.

KEVIN

Nola? Are you all right?

NOLA

(nods; softly)

It was a—miscarriage.

(beat; near tears)

It was a little girl, Kevin. A beautiful little girl ...

KEVIN

I'm so sorry, Nola.

NOLA

(wistfully)

God, Kevin, I wanted it so badly. The chance to ... give someone the kind of love I never had, growing up ...

This hits close to home for Kevin; he looks thoughtful, pensive. A beat of silence, and then:

NOLA

Kevin? Is something wrong?

KEVIN

(after a beat)

Carol's mom ... she was an alcoholic. I remember this time Carol said to me how she really wanted to have a baby ... because she wanted to be the kind of mother she never had.

(quietly)

I guess I never really understood what she meant ... till now.

Off Nola's sad smile:

CUT TO

33. EXTERIOR A HOUSE IN SUBURBAN BOSTON SUPERED OVER: DAY SEVEN

A big man in his late thirties, wearing dungarees and a work shirt, is pushing a power mower across the front lawn as Daniel walks up the path to the house. He stops, tries to make himself heard above the din of the mower.

DANIEL

(loudly)

Excuse me! I'm looking for a—

(consults notepad)

—George Lester?

The man, Lester, turns off the mower; as it whines down, Lester takes a step or two

toward Daniel.

LESTER

(a bit wearily)

I'm David Lester. My father passed away, three years ago. Is there something I can help you with—?

DANIEL

I'm sorry. I didn't know. My name is Gaddis ... I was told your father knew a couple named Goldman ... Robert and Nola Goldman. I'm trying to reach anyone who knew them ...

LESTER

(more relaxed)

Oh. Yes, of course. My father was a union organizer, back in the thirties ... the company he worked for tried to fire him for that, but Goldman sued them ... and won.

(beat)

He was a good man. My father thought very highly of him.

DANIEL

Do you know of anyone else who might've known him, back then?

LESTER

Have you tried his law partner? I think his name was Rakin ... Raskin ... something like that?

Daniel is scribbling furiously on his notepad.

DANIEL

That's fine ... I can get the exact information from county records, I'm sure ... Thank you. Thank you very much.

He shakes hands with Lester, then strikes back down the pathway to the street. As he reaches the curb, he stops, takes out the notepad again.

34. CLOSE THE NOTEPAD

A list of maybe half a dozen names, all except the last scratched out in heavy black ink. Now Daniel scratches out the last name—George Lester—and writes a new one, below that: Raskin ... (?)

35. INTERIOR COMPUTER LAB DAY #7

Nola, now in her fifties, her beauty still undiminished by age, sits in the holo display—as, in front of her, a holographic chess board floats in mid-air. Opposite her, Kevin sits on a chair, a computer keyboard in his lap; every time he touches the keyboard, a chess piece on the board moves or, if removed from the board, winks out of existence. (Nola, of course, moves the pieces by hand.)

KEVIN

(studying the board; intensely)

Mmmm ...

(makes a move; then)

You're a good player.

NOLA

I had a good teacher. Robert loved chess.

(makes a move)

You're no slouch at this yourself.

KEVIN

(smiles)

She said, having won three games in a row.

(makes move)

Are you sure you want to be playing games, like this, instead of ... well ... remembering? What about your later years with Robert ... was there anything that might—

NOLA

Oh. Lord, I'm so tired of talking about myself. Not right now, Kevin.

(makes a move)

Have you spoken to your wife lately? To Carol?

Kevin makes a move, but does not answer. Nola studies him a long beat; then:

NOLA

(quietly)

Do you really want to lose her, Kevin? Kevin looks up, sharply, and in his voice is the same anger, the same—pain?—we have heard in his arguments with Carol.

KEVIN

Don't talk to me about losing things! (hotly)

Look. All I know is, the minute you become truly happy in this life, that's when they pull the rug out from under you! That's when it's all taken away!

NOLA

(nods)

And if you're never happy ... you never know what it's like to lose it. Do you?

A beat as Kevin reacts to this—confused, uncertain.

KEVIN

Well, I wouldn't put it ... I mean, that's not what I—

Another beat ... and it is as though a veil has been partially lifted from him; his anger is spent, replaced by a certain—embarrassment.

KEVIN

I guess it is kind of a ... stupid way to look at things ...

Nola smiles. Kevin returns his attention to the board. His eyes light up as he sees a window of opportunity, and makes his move.

KEVIN

Check ... and mate.

Nola looks up, pleased; she smiles.

NOLA

Very good. You're learning.

CUT TO

36. EXTERIOR RETIREMENT HOME SUPERED OVER: DAY EIGHT

37. EXTERIOR RETIREMENT HOME GARDENS DAY FAVORING RUSKIN

John Ruskin is a frail but still alert man in his eighties, making his way through the bushes and hedges of the garden with more agility than Daniel, who follows. Ruskin's voice is clear and firm as he remembers, absently caressing flowers and buds as he walks; it is only something in the way he touches those flowers that tells us he is blind.

DANIEL

I appreciate your talking with me, Mister Ruskin. I'm afraid most of

Robert and Nola's friends are ... ah ... He stops awkwardly, but Ruskin only smiles.

RUSKIN

Most of them are dead?

DANIEL

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to sound ... tactless.

RUSKIN

(soft laugh)

I've spent the last fifteen years in darkness, Mister Gaddis, and I've managed to enjoy life in spite of it. If it's darkness I have ahead of me, too, I think I can make the best of it.

DANIEL

You knew Robert and Nola for ... how long?

RUSKIN

Thirty years. Ever since Robert opened up his law practice. They were lovely people ... Robert with his passion for social justice, Nola and her love of poetry ... she published quite a few papers, did you know ... that?

DANIEL

Yes, I did. Did either of them leave behind any kind of ... 'unfinished business'? Some goal, some dream they never fulfilled?

RUSKIN

(a beat; sadly)

Well, in later years, you know, Robert lost so much of his ... passion. After Nola died.

(shakes his head)

He was a different man. She was taken from him so early; I don't think he ever really recovered from that ... Daniel reacts to this news with startlement. What?

DANIEL

Excuse me, but ... exactly when did Nola die?

RUSKIN

(thoughtfully)

In March, I believe. March of ... 1943. She was only thirty-five. A waste. A terrible waste.

DANIEL

(stunned)

How—did she die?

RUSKIN

I thought you knew. She died in childbirth.

Off Daniel's look of astonishment and dawning realization.

CUT TO

38. INTERIOR COMPUTER LAB DAY #8 FAVORING KEVIN

He lies, dozing on the cot, dead to the world, the exhaustion of the past nine days catching up to him. We pan away, slowly toward the holo display, where we find:

39. NOLA

Now in her mid-sixties. Still beautiful, still loving ... looking affectionately at the sleeping Kevin. Then she sighs, knowing what must be done; she turns, facing a nearby computer console, raises a hand ... and the console hums as it's activated.

40. THE CONSOLE

A voice synthesizer whirs into life. Nola's voice issues from it:

NOLA'S VOICE

Carol? It's Kev. I'm at the lab ...

The sentence is repeated—remodulated once, twice, three times, changing from Nola's voice into a tinny, robotic voice, then remodulating again and again until finally it is:

KEVIN'S VOICE

Carol? It's Kev. I'm at the lab ...

41. NOLA

She nods with satisfaction, turns and gestures toward a nearby phone; there's a click as the computer "picks up" the phone, then the beeping of a number being dialed.

42. INTERIOR DRAYTON HOME DAY

As the phone rings and Carol answers it.

CAROL

Hello?

KEVIN'S VOICE

(filter)

Carol? It's Kev. I'm at the lab ...

CAROL

Kevin? Are you all right?

KEVIN'S VOICE

I'm fine, honey. And I've missed you.

CAROL

(holding back tears)

I've missed you, too.

KEVIN'S VOICE

I'm ready to come home. Think you can swing by and give a guy a lift?

CAROL

(a smile)

I think I can manage that.

43. INTERIOR COMPUTER LAB ON NOLA

Listening to the last of the conversation.

KEVIN'S VOICE

See you in a while, hon. I love you. And the computer clicks off. Nola smiles, turns to the still-sleeping Kevin.

NOLA

Kevin? Time to wake up.

He stirs, turns over on his cot to face her, clearly.

KEVIN

Nola? What's—

He sees her, now a woman in her mid-sixties, and is startled; it's too soon. Too soon.

NOLA

(calmly)

It's time for me to go now, Kevin.

Kevin gets to his feet, his heart pounding; he's suddenly terrified.

KEVIN

(softly)

No ...

NOLA

I'm afraid so. I accomplished what I had to ... and now it's time to leave.

KEVIN

What? What did you accomplish? Why were you here?

NOLA

I was here for you, Kevin.

KEVIN

(startled)

For ... me?

(half-beat)

Look ... I don't understand any of this, but if what you say is true, then ... please. Don't leave.

NOLA

My time is up, Kevin. I'm sorry.

KEVIN

(suddenly angry)

You can't! Not yet.

NOLA

I have no choice.

KEVIN

(exploding)

No! Damn it, Nola, I can't lose you again!

NOLA

(gently)

Like you lost me before?

KEVIN

Yes! Yes! Like before! Like—

He stops in mid-sentence, suddenly aware of what he's saying. His face goes white; his eyes widen; part of him tries to deny what he is coming to realize, while part of him knows the truth. Nola smiles at him with love and sorrow.

NOLA

I left you too soon, my darling. I didn't mean to, but I did ...

KEVIN

(shaking head)

No ... no ... this isn't ... possible

NOLA

You carried the grief with you all your life ... and into the next.

KEVIN

(dully)

But ... I don't ... remember ...

NOLA

You remembered enough to be afraid.

Afraid of love ... afraid of losing it ...

(a beat)

I had to live out a life with you ... to make up for the one we never had a chance to share ... so the fear would go away.

KEVIN

You ... you knew? From the start?

NOLA

(shakes head)

No. Only after the—miscarriage. I wasn't just remembering my pain, Kevin ... I was remembering my death.

(half-beat)

After that, it all became clear ...

KEVIN

(near tears)

I don't know if I ... believe any of this ...

NOLA

(nods)

Perhaps that's just as well. You have a life to get back to. Don't let it slip by. Not again.

(beat)

I have to leave now.

KEVIN

No. Wait. Just a minute more.

He hurries to a table, opens a drawer, takes out a well-thumbed book and hurries back to Nola. He looks up at her, his eyes shining with sorrow and affection.

KEVIN

Yeats, again. Do you remember the one called ... 'When You Are Old'?

NOLA

(nods)

'When you are old and gray and full of sleep—'

KEVIN

Yes. There's a line here ...

(reads from book)

'Many loved your moments of glad grace, / And loved your beauty with love false and true, / But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you, / And loved the sorrows of your changing face ...'

He looks up; Nola smiles a soft, gentle, happy smile.

NOLA

Goodbye, Robert. I love you.

And, with that, she vanishes from the holo display. Kevin stares into the blue pillar of light as though searching for some last trace of her, but none is forthcoming; his reverie is interrupted by a BUZZ of someone at the door to the lab. He goes and presses his palm onto the scanning plate; the door slides open to reveal Carol.

CAROL

You called for a taxi, mister?

KEVIN

I called for—?

A beat; he glances back at the holo display, laughs a silent laugh, then turns back to Carol.

KEVIN

I guess I did.

They embrace; Kevin kisses her, tenderly, and when they break the clinch, Carol's attention is caught by something behind Kevin.

CAROL

Kevin? What's—that?

He turns to find, floating in the holo display ... a sphere, identical to the one he created for the young Nola. He and Carol squat down to study it ... the display snaps off ... and the sphere, as it falls, changes into a solid, three-dimensional, vari-colored ball which bounces right to—Carol. She picks it up ... hands it to Kevin ... and as he takes it, their eyes meet, something at once old and new passes between them ... and they smile.

NARRATOR

'And bending down beside the glowing bars, / Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled / and paced upon the mountains overhead / And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.' From William Butler Yeats, to all those who have loved, and lost, and loved again. ... on earth, or in ... the Twilight Zone. Through this last we tilt up to a blue holographic starfield, which then transforms itself into our own 'crowd of stars'—the Twilight Zone starscape—and we:

FADE OUT

THE END

NEXT STOP

(continued from page 55)

a while before the next step, whatever that may be.

It turns out to be quite a while. Alan calls me two weeks after the outline is in and tells me that the series is "on hiatus." This means that they have not been immediately notified of their renewal for next season by CBS, and that means my episode, which is scheduled for second season, is effectively in limbo. Fortunately, I have other work to occupy my time—three novels in various stages of completion, and several episodes of toy-based cartoons.

Dissolve to my house, six months later. CBS has finally decided to pick up *Twilight Zone*, and Alan calls to tell me that my revised outline has been sent to them. He also tells me not to get my hopes up—the network has been rather picky about the stories they want to see on the second season. I resign myself to another long period of suspense. When I sold the story, my daughter couldn't even walk—now she negotiates the stairs on her own and can hit ten mph on a flat surface with a tailwind. I figure she'll be in college by the time this show gets on the air.

Much to everyone's surprise, however, CBS turns around on the outline in three days, with no notes. This is astounding—in all my years of writing TV, I've had maybe five or six stories approved with no notes. Network executives *have* to make notes on stories—it's generic. In this case, however, there are none, and I am given the go to teleplay.

I thought writing the outline was hard, but this is murder. Having just written a spate of shows full of giant robots that fold up into trucks, sports cars and household appliances, it is something of a change to begin a script about an unrequited love story between two people, one of whom happens to have been dead for twenty years. No spaceships exploding? No evil archvillains cackling shrewdly as they implement their latest plan for galactic domination? No laser beams? How am I going to fill twenty-four pages without violence and mayhem?

As it turns out, I fill more than that, going to around thirty. The

script is long, but I can't see any way to cut it, so I turn it in and hope for the best.

A week later, I'm back in De-Guerre's office. There's a large, watermelon-shaped seed pod lying by the door—a relic from David Gerrold's episode, "A Day in Beaumont." De-Guerre sees me eyeing it and mentions that he's been waiting for it to hatch. I ask him how he can be sure it hasn't already.

There've been some changes in staff since the last season—Jim Crocker is no longer there, and neither is Harlan Ellison, last season's creative consultant. Alan now occupies that post. George R. R. Martin, Martin Pasko, and Rebecca Parr are new story editors this season. I've worked

"When I sold the story, my daughter couldn't even walk. Now she negotiates the stairs on her own, and can hit 10 mph on a flat surface with a tailwind."

with Marty and Becky on other shows, and I've known George in science fiction circles for a few years. Maybe the rewrite won't be so bad. After all, I followed the outline slavishly, and the network had no notes, so it should be copacetic, right?

This naive assumption lasts about as long as a snowball in a supernova. The script is fileted, dissected, fractionated, and all but run through a paper shredder. I can't even protest all that much, because the suggestions for rewriting it are, by and large, quite good. Unfortunately, they also result in what's known as a page-one rewrite, which means that everything after the words "FADE IN" is out the window.

Somewhat disheartened, but still willing to do my part for art, I head back to the word processor.

If I thought the first draft was hard, this one is sheer torture, because by this time I'm so close to the story and its characters that I have no idea

if what I'm writing belongs in the *Twilight Zone* or the *Toilet Zone*. I press ahead. At one point I tell Alan that the temptation to put a giant robot in one of the scenes is almost overwhelming. He advises me to resist.

At last the second draft is done. By now I don't care if I ever hear the words "Twilight Zone" again, and my wife and friends have long since learned not to hum the first eight notes of the old show or to do Rod Serling imitations if they want to retain full motor control of their limbs. I turn it in to "The Cornfield," which is the name given to the set of trailers on the far end of the lot where the new story editors have their tiny cubicles, far from the main production office. The nickname is, of course, a reference to a classic episode from the old series and invariably leads to remarks such as "It's good that I've been cut off at story!" or "It's good that the network hated my script!"

A week passes. The ominous silence continues. Normally, I would be a professional and wait to hear from them; however, in this case, I have to know what's going on so I can finish this article for the magazine. I call Alan.

Alan tells me the good news: "Nightsong" is scheduled to be produced for the second season—and the bad news: he's doing the writer's polish on the script. The in-house consensus was that it still wasn't quite what they wanted, and they decided on this route to save time on the final draft.

This is disappointing, of course—but it's also the way TV works, and I've been writing shows long enough to be somewhat philosophical about it. I assure Alan there's no hard feelings—I'm sure he'll do a good job on it. He urges me to come by the studio when it's in production and watch the shoot.

I probably will. It's been quite an experience, by turns exhilarating and frustrating. I'm both glad and sorry that it's over. My story is out of my hands now—whether it works or not when it's aired is up to the story editor, the network, the actors, the director, and literally hundreds of other people.

That's television—art by committee. Which is why, in so many cases, it's not art at all, and barely even entertainment. In the case of this series, however, the percentage of success is far higher than most shows. I have high hopes for "Nightsong"—and fond memories, overall, of my brief working stint in the *Twilight Zone*. ■

Darkside

(continued from page 53)

Of course, they couldn't release a complete list because the broadcast schedule hasn't been set and they do have to keep an eye on the competition. But from what we saw, it looks like *Teletext*'s right: they are doing an impressive list of classics.

For starters, there's Robert Bloch's "Everybody Needs a Little Love," Charles L. Grant's "The Milkman Cometh," John Cheever's "Enormous Radio," Frederick Pohl's "The Bitterest Pill," and Frederik Brown's "The GeeseSTACKS." As for future classics they've got Clive Barker's "The Yattering and Jack," as well as an adaptation of Lois McMaster Bujold's "The Barter," first published in the April, 1985 issue of *Twilight Zone*. ["The Hole Truth," a new Bujold story, appears in this issue.]

Drawing from both coasts, *Darkside* is also coming back with a number of classic actors, among them the stage and screen star E.G. Marshall (best known from *The Defenders*), William Hickey (*Prizzi's Honor*'s don), Charles Ludlum, the wild and crazy co-founder of the Ridiculous Theater Company, and forties film star Marga-

ret O'Brien.

What will continue to set *Darkside* apart from other anthology shows, though, is its free-wheeling spirit. As William Teitler points out, "We have an awful lot of creative freedom on *Darkside*. And out of this atmosphere comes wonderful, original work. If an actor wants to change a line, he doesn't have to get it reviewed by sixteen people. If a director wants to change a scene, she doesn't have to make a lot of telephone calls to get it approved."

Critics might quibble about whether *Darkside* shows are either original or wonderful. But no one can deny that they're fun. Indeed, one of the best things about *Darkside* has been its refusal to take itself too seriously, thanks largely to its low budgets and eager but inexperienced staff.

George Romero's teleplay "Circus," directed by Michael Gornick, is half slapstick and half serious production. The story of a stuffed-shirt reporter drawn in and eventually done in by a classic house of horrors, it

features bits like a campy vampire biting into a live and very bloody lamb, along with ferocious dogs chewing on squirming mechanical rats. Then it tops them off with lines like "I can't understand why people throw their money away on lurid fictions" and jokes like "Not even you can feel this is suitable for children."

Does this sound like Romero's swipe at the critics? You bet. "Circus" makes it clear that in this world, anyone who complains that horror will do lasting damage to children just doesn't get the point: Horror is a game that deliberately confuses illusion and reality. It's not real, you see.

And oddly enough, although it's easy to disagree with Romero's philosophy, this idea just might explain *Darkside*'s success. Unlike other programs bent on convincing us that their other worlds are real, *Darkside*, with its low budgets and fakey effects, doesn't make any pretense. So instead of sitting back and saying "Okay, prove it," you tend to say, "Okay I know it's not real, but I'll play. I'm with you."

—Robin Bromley

Amazing Stories

(continued from page 52)

decided to experiment with the 8:30 Monday night timeslot during the summer. But the decision to stick with that depended on—you guessed it—the ratings, and the numbers weren't in at this writing.

There was also talk of breaking with Spielberg's characteristic secrecy about new shows. In addition to screening stories for the press, they are planning to run trailers heralding coming attractions after each episode. But apparently this strategy hasn't been put into effect yet.

All in all, details about the new, improved *Amazing Stories* are sketchy. We know that Spielberg plans to direct one segment, and the directors Joe Dante (*Gremlins*) and Paul Barthel (*Eating Raoul*) have been invited back. There will also be an episode featuring *Back to the Future*'s loveable madman Christopher Lloyd as a teacher. Beyond that, we are waiting with you to see if this season's *Amazing Stories* will live up to its name.

—Robin Bromley

"Author... Author"

(They could be calling for you.)

The word-hungry world of communications (literature, broadcasting, theatre, newspapers, magazines, etc.) offers qualified writers a host of opportunities.

And along with any writing achievements there are intangible rewards as well... the knowledge that you can inform, amuse, convince, conciliate, compel and thrill millions of readers.

FREE WRITER'S APTITUDE TEST

may reveal your hidden talents, and indicate whether your writing potential will lead to writing growth and fulfillment. No obligation. No salesman will call. WRITERS INSTITUTE division of Newspaper Institute of America makes this "no-strings" offer to discover trainable talents for its Home Study Program. No obligation.

WRITERS INSTITUTE, INC.

Division of
Newspaper Institute
of America
112 West Boston Post Road
Mamaroneck, N.Y. 10543

- Licensed by the New York State Education Dept.
- Accredited Member of National Home Study Council
- Approved For U.S. Rehabilitation Training
- Approved N.Y. State Education Dept. For Veterans Training

MAIL COUPON TODAY

Writers Institute, Inc., Dept. 135-12-86
112 West Boston Post Road
Mamaroneck, New York 10543

Please rush my FREE APTITUDE TEST by return mail. I understand no salesman will call.

Name

Address

City State Zip

SCREEN

by Gahan Wilson

The perils and pleasures of remakes and sequels—and "underground" movies.

Aliens (20th Century-Fox)
Psycho III (Universal)
Invaders from Mars (Cannon)
Poltergeist II (MGM)
Labyrinth (Tri-Star)
Big Trouble in Little China (20th Century-Fox)

The troop of sequels and/or new versions of golden oldies (sometimes it is hard to decide which you're looking at) continues, both in our area of interest and elsewhere, and while the phenomenon has its tiresome aspects it has, for quite a stretch to come, been thoroughly justified by the appearance of *Aliens* (I'm glad they thought it through five minutes longer and thereby avoided calling it *Alien II*), which intercepts Ridley Scott's original and runs it down the allegorical football field, if you will forgive me what may be my first—and could easily be my last—usage of a sporting image in this column, for a winning touchdown.

The director and co-author of *Aliens* is *The Terminator's* James Cameron, and it is obvious that Mr. Cameron is a new kid on the block (a revered term in short-term-history-conscious L.A. who is, without any doubt whatsoever, causing the estab-



lished chiller kings to look to their laurels and clutch their thrones the tighter. Cameron has got that zing, that certain thing, for sure.

Call in the Marines

The story idea behind this second version is simple and uncluttered: since Sigourney Weaver managed to rid the universe of an alien, let's put her up against a small army of the buggers! This, plus a few other uncomplicated basic notions (1. Call in the marines, only a futuristic, non-sexist variation thereof; 2. Bring in a gutsy little kid we can worry about and admire, and 3. Develop a little icing-on-the-cake so far as the aliens are concerned), plus adroit mixing of them, plus a really

gorgeous knack for roller-coaster building that *The Terminator* only hinted at, and Cameron has all he needs to turn out what will be the scrounger to beat until the next big challenge movie comes along.

I, of course, cannot go into plot twists and specific events (the butler did it) or I'll mess up this or that shock or surprise for you, but among the many nice things to watch out for is the effective and healthily-bracing feminist slant throughout; a genuinely loveable portrayal of the grunt life which will probably be a boon to recruitment offices (it's the first time it struck me I might actually enjoy being a marine, but of course I'm thinking of the marines of seventy five years hence. Still, science is performing geriatric miracles ...), and what is probably a depressingly accurate delineation of the sort of corporate yuppies we can confidently anticipate during our next century of progress.

The Giger-inspired monsters themselves prove as difficult as ever to animate convincingly, but Cameron falls back on the reliable techniques of the thirties (and Val Lewton later on), giving us only flashes and blurs, and, when we absolutely have to see them square on, he has them flail distractingly and wraps them in about as effective a mesh of sound effects and music as we've had so far in a film of this kind. Do, by the way, see this movie in a theater with the best speakers in town as every clatter and clunk, not to mention each screech, is lovingly crafted to move convincingly and unnervingly about you as you cower in your seat. And of course the

space ships and whatever are completely believable (the military gear together with its nice drummy background played by the London Symphony Orchestra is particularly fun), but we've become spoiled about the sort of thing so you don't really notice. If you haven't seen it already (how did you resist it?) do so. It's a swell movie. I love it when I can say that.

PSYCHO-babble

Sad news on the sequel front is *Psycho III*, which is exactly what I was afraid *Psycho II* (which was, as noted in a previous column, a highly satisfactory pastiche) would turn out to be: only another slasher movie and therefore, of course, an embarrassment. I had hoped Tony Perkins would pull it off. So, as far as I know, did everyone else, but the difficulties of the thing proved too much for him and, in a film so overshadowed by the genius of Hitchcock's original, the failure is particularly visible.

Unlike the makers of *Psycho II*, Perkins and his associates don't seem to be aware of the challenges of the game they've taken on. If they were even trying to capture something of the Master's feel for stark framing, for his put-you-right-there camera point of view, for the humorous and/or horrifying juxtapositions in his editing, they failed. Particularly painful is their apparent lack of understanding of the difference between a gore-galore epic and Hitchcock's positively puritanical approach to bloody murder. There is, for example, a shot of a man eating, all unaware, ice cubes coated with human blood. This would be a perfectly okay procedure in any splatter film, particularly when it's presented in a joking mood as it is here, but it's a notion that would have made Alfred Hitchcock ill, and I am absolutely certain that if his shade were to materialize at a spiritualistic seance (gad, what an interesting ghost he'd make!), it would, with lip-curved wit, elegantly express the decedent's posthumous disgust with the business. Another thing—not unimportant—the mummy of dear old Mother Bates in *Psycho* was lean and fierce as a hawk as it should have been. The one in *Psycho III* is soft and floppy and, with its funny, puffy little face, and its fuzzy, fluffy mop of hair it put me, at least, very much in mind of a Cabbage Patch kid.

A Fine Paranoid Vision
Floating somewhere in between these



two is *Invasions from Mars*, a remake of the film of that name directed by William Cameron Menzies, this new one directed by Tobe Hooper. Hooper is obviously highly respectful and very fond of the original. He—and all concerned—have clearly worked extremely hard on the project and exerted great ingenuity in bringing the special effects up to the standards of a big budget film of the eighties (both the monsters and their monstrous environment are cleverly inventive and very well realized—they are just the sort of simultaneously ghastly and funny Martians a little kid might figure he'd run into)—without seriously violating the mood or thesis or essential structure of Menzies's made-on-a-shoe-string classic of the early fifties (in which the one main monster was a circus giant walking around like a huge Kermit the Frog in a green velour coverall and goggles, and the other was a female midget with his solemn little head stuck into a kind of gaudy goldfish bowl).

The story, in case you missed the original and haven't yet seen this new version, is a fine paranoid vision of the problems an average American kid (well, let's say a very fortunate, upper middle class, white American kid) would have if nasty creatures from outer space began to subversively take over the bodies of his friends and loved ones (a very fifties kind of idea) and he and only he knew the insidious thing was happening.

Where would he turn? Who among the mysterious and unpredictable tribe of adults would listen to

him and help him? And how could he, a pre-adolescent nothing, deal with the evil machinations of the ever-so-powerful and high-brow leader-of the yucky Martian invaders—the great and awesome Supreme Intelligence?

The kid is played very nicely and blondly by Hunter Carson, and he does find help (as he did in the original film) in the person of the school psychologist (played very nicely by his real-life mother, Karen Black) who has the best line in the entire picture—the real reason, so far as I can see for the entire remake—when, after realizing she has irrevocably thrown away her career and standing in the community on the strength of this tow-headed lad's tale of beings from outer space taking over his parents' bodies, she asks him, in a brief moment of terrified clear-headedness: "You're not just a crazy kid, are you?"

Actually, there is another excellent reason for having remade the movie, and that's the performance and general handling of Louise Fletcher as the sort of frighteningly overpowering teacher we've all been bullied and outwitted by at some point in our scholastic career, only in this case Ms. Fletcher actually does turn out to be a monster. She has fun with it, the script has fun with it, Hooper has fun with it, I had fun with it, and so will you have fun with it. I missed the stylized staging of the characters in the Menzies's original which physically isolated the child from the strange adults around him—he really did some lovely work with that—but, what the

hell, you win a little; you lose a little. And this certainly is a great big improvement for Hooper over his more recent epics.

Give Up The 'Geist

Speaking of Hooper's past epics, we now have, puzzlingly, *Poltergeist II* which, considering how much money must have been spent on it, really has to be mentioned in a column specializing in movies of the strange and gruesome. Why, after *Poltergeist I* (say—why don't they number the first movie routinely at that? You know: *Gone with the Wind I*, *All Quiet on the Western Front I*, *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari I*) anybody saw any need for *II* is more than I can say, but they did, and it's even worse, yes, friends, even worse than *Poltergeist I*.

Now, I know you're going to say that's impossible. I know you're going to say that's more than hard to believe, but step up, step up! Buy your ticket at the box office from the pretty lady, and you'll see it's true, friends, you'll see it's true. H. R. Giger's perfectly okay, but not inspired monster designs turned into silly putty right before your very eyes! Witness for yourself actor Craig T. Nelson vomit up from his very own mouth an unconvincing monster, the sort of unconvincing monster you all learned to know and love in *Poltergeist I*. Stare astounded at a small boy becoming entirely emeshed in his own dental braces, and wonder at the lengths to which unconscious humor can go. Step up, step up! Gape astounded at even more expensive dead body dummies than in *Poltergeist I* and fantasize about what you, personally, could have done with all that cash. Yessir, yessir, you won't believe it till you see it! Great God almighty, you may not believe it even then.

Lost in the Labyrinth

Jim Henson has rejoined with Brian Froud to make a kind of non-sequel sequel to *The Dark Crystal* called *Labyrinth*, and they have spared no expense in hiring talented people to help them out in the enterprise: David Bowie to write songs for it and star in it as the King of the Goblins, Terry Jones of Monty Python to try to put a little life into the script, and so on and so on, but the thing just doesn't work; as a matter of fact, it works even less than *The Dark Crystal* did.

I think the essential problem is that none of the characters, whether played by puppets or humans, have

any soul to them. When Henson did the Lewis Carroll creatures for the recent film on Carroll and his Alice in *Dreamchild*, his puppets were *alive* because they were invested with the actuality that Carroll had given his weird creatures. Messrs. Henson/Jones, et cetera., starting from scratch, do not, or at least in *Labyrinth* do not, seem to have the knack of investing their own creations with that sort of actuality.

The basic problem with their beings is that none of them have any motivation at all except for the one directly in front of them ("I must guard this bridge!", "I will help this little fellow!", et cetera.), and that makes them hollow from the start.

We knew that all of Dorothy's odd chums in *The Wizard of Oz* were primarily interested in helping her get down that Yellow Brick road to the Emerald City, to be sure, but we also knew (because we had been told) that they needed love or intelligence or bravery, that they needed them so terribly much that it was credible that they would, that they *could* (for all their frailties and comical failings) defy the Wicked Witch of the North and her terrible minions in order to get them. We also knew, right from the start, something that they didn't know at all: we knew that only their modesty prevented the sweet, silly things from ever dreaming that they *had* their love, intelligence, and bravery all along.

Labyrinth's critters have none of these extra levels; there are no sides nor backs to them, only fronts. It may be that the *Dreamchild* success might indicate the track Henson might take with more profit: instead of attempting to myth-make on his own, he might consider adapting some living classic; he might look into George McDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin*, or E. R. Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros*, or browse through C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*. It's a good tip. If nothing else, it would show him how the big boys do it.

Grand Ethnic Fantasy

To close on an upbeat tone I'd like to say that you are more than likely to enjoy *Big Trouble in Little China*, if you're careful not to approach it seriously. It's a pulp fantasy about what little non-Chinese kids think their city's Chinatown might *really* be like if they *really* knew its secrets. There are many secret panels, of course, that goes without saying, and behind them hidden dens, both vile

and of exquisite luxury, and under it all—winding, darkly curling beneath its narrow, labyrinthine streets with their exotic, ineffable names—is a misty cavern full of dragons and ancient Chinese demons. Didn't you know that was true? Of course you did. If you were a little non-Chinese kid, that is. And maybe if you were a little Chinese kid, too. Christ, it may all be *there!*

Big Trouble takes this grand American fantasy about one of this country's richer ethnic neighborhoods, combines it with the glorious razzmatazz of the Kung Fu movies, shakes it up with a little Doc Savage (the script is in large part by W. D. Richter of the glorious *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai*), lets John Carpenter direct it all with utter abandon, and succeeds in being excellent summer soda pop; just the thing to take your mind off a real scorcher.

There are many excellent aspects to *Big Trouble*, but let me point out in particular James Hong as the two-thousand-plus year old Lo Pan, the evil mastermind behind all those dreadful things you *know* go on in Chinatown, who knows and uses all the darker secrets of Tao magic, who lusts after pretty young girls one one-hundredth of his age, who can fry you with a blast of mystic fire from his glaring, demonic eyes, and who is probably responsible for that egg foo yung you ate at the restaurant on Mott Street last August that made you feel queasy all afternoon. Hong is truly marvelous in the part, and his evil, cackling delight when one of his vile schemes *really works* is positively infectious. Kurt Russell visibly enjoys himself as a sort of lout hero who we know *really* will eventually beat the bad guys but who is, in the meantime, undeniably a vain dummy. And my favorite visual touch (James Hong's formidable assassins descending from the sky hand over hand on lightning bolts is a pleasure to watch, and there is a swell red-haired monster that loves to lurk behind lacquer screens) is the lavish use, in the villain's elaborate underground temple dedicated to incredibly ancient and evil gods and demons and the ravishment of beauteous virgins (at least it would be nice if they were virgins), of neon decoration every bit as crass and gaudy as that which bedecks the restaurants and back-scratcher shops of that innocent, tourist Chinatown high above his subterranean lair. A really great, tacky touch. ■

THE OTHER SIDE



PHOTO BY ALOMA

STAR WOMAN

In the late 1960s, author Carlos Casteneda became an important figure in the American counter-culture when he wrote about don Juan, the brujo, or sorcerer, of the Yaqui Indians in the American Southwest.

Fifteen years later, another writer has crossed over into the realms of the American Indian spirit world, but this time the journey has been made by a woman; Lynn Andrews, author of *Star Woman* (Warner Books).

Casteneda wrote of a strong, masculine bond that takes place within male secret societies of Indian warriors. In contrast, Andrews describes a deep, maternal bond that she feels all women share—a bond to the earth and its natural rhythms which is still embedded in the traditions of the American Indians.

Andrews's teacher, a Cree Indian medicine woman named Agnes Whistling Elk, took her on as an apprentice in hopes that she would, through her writing, teach people to heal the sacred earth.

"You have been brought here by a vision quest," Agnes told Andrews, "Knowingly or unknowingly. One day you will be a bridge between two different worlds, the primal mind and the white consciousness."

Andrews considers *Star Woman* a "completion book." The fourth book in her series, Andrews says it is "the end of the circle, or the place where the circle joins itself." She is now off to Australia to begin a new quest—learning the native magic of Australia from the women of the Sacred Dreamtime.

—Ariel Remler

CYBER-HYPE

Hyping themselves as "The Fifth Generation of Rock'n'Roll" (who's counting, guys?), Brit techno-victims Sigue Sigue Sputnik might just be the prototype cyber-punk entertainment android none of us has been waiting for. Looking and sounding like they've just jacked out of a William Gibson novel, S³ are masterminded by chief programmer and punk has-been Tony James, instigator of such 1976/77 seminal squirts as the London S⁵, Chelsea, and Generation X (the last best-known as spawning ground for poseur prince Billy Idol). With Sigue, James's grand delusion has come full circle: while those bands and their punk brethren gleefully chainsawed the bloated corpse of '70s

corporate rock with a demented vigilante fervor, Sputnik enshrines the hated establishment's crimes in an orthodoxy of hedonism, narcissism, and materialism.

In a dazzlingly crass display of enterprising salesmanship, James has put the band up for sale, posing lasciviously with high-tech toys and selling out advertising space between the cuts on their first LP, *Flaunt It* (Manhattan Records). That the Who's *Sell Out* album parodied this idea almost twenty years ago doesn't bother James—swiping is all part of the shtick. In fact, swiping is all, period.

While there is something repulsively fascinating about such cynically reductionist manipulation, there is one crucial element missing—the music. In a word, it's awful. Does it make any difference? Probably not. Just who is this joke on anyway?

—Lou Stathis



PHOTO BY JOHNNY ROZSA COPYRIGHT © MANHATTAN RECORDS

THE OTHER SIDE



VAMP: Grace Jones portrays the vampiric seductress Katrina in the New World Pictures release.

VAMPIRES NEED LOVE, TOO

"Vampires are very lonely people," says Dr. Stephen Kaplan, founder of the Vampire Research Center in Elmhurst, New York.

Kaplan, self-ordained "Father of Contemporary Vampirism," opened his research center in 1972 because he felt that vampires were misunderstood. "Society sees them as crazy, psychopathic killers," According to Kaplan, however, vampires are driven by a natural, physiological need, not a supernatural force.

He feels that the whole image of vampires has been distorted by the Hollywood film industry. "First of all, they do not have fangs," he says, "and they are not all from Transylvania."

Apparently, others feel as Kaplan does. "We get calls from hundreds of young, beautiful women pleading to be bitten." According to Kaplan, people find themselves drawn to vampires because of their strong, magnetic presence and their haunting, sexual charm.

Kaplan says that the age of serious vampire research has only just begun. He hopes that the increased attention and respect will encourage authentic vampires to "come out of their coffins." So, if you know of any blood-sucking individuals who are ready to see the light, tell them to write to the Vampire Research Center, P.O. Box 252, Elmhurst, New York, 11373.

—Ariel Remler

A LIMB FOR A LIMB

In 1980, an unlucky lab rat had the misfortune to have his foreleg amputated. Little did he know that his sacrifice would aid in the scientific breakthrough of the regeneration of limbs.

Dr. Robert Becker, who headed the study of tissue regeneration at the State University of New York Upstate Medical Center in Syracuse, says he succeeded in regenerating the fully developed limb of a rat from his shoulder to his elbow by the use of electrical impulses.

When a limb is injured, says Becker, an electrical signal is generated from the nervous system. Applying electrical stimulation to damag-

ed tissue aids in cell growth. But, explains Becker, muscle tissue can only regenerate if the cells are brought back to their most primitive state—the embryonic state. Only in this state are they able to multiply..

According to Becker, his research brought him close to understanding how the stimulation of embryonic cells can be applied to human tissue.

"We were able to duplicate this electrical signal in rats, but not in humans."

Becker looks forward to the day when human arms and legs can be regenerated as easily as we can regrow our hair and fingernails. Perhaps then when people exclaim, "Why, you've grown another foot since the last time I saw you!"—they'll really mean it.

—Ariel Remler



ILLUSTRATION BY J.K. POTTER

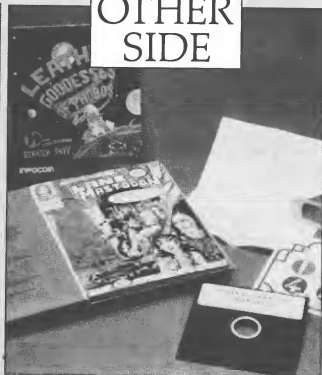
THE OTHER SIDE

THE LEATHER GODDESS

It starts back in 1938 in a small, quiet neighborhood bar. You've been drinking cheap beer—too much of it—and, first thing you know, you've got to use the can. You get up, go to the john. Suddenly, in a burst of sulfur and a roil of methane, a gelatinous, tentacular alien materializes in front of you. He attacks. You struggle....

...and the next thing you know you're waking up in a fashionably appointed cell on Phobos, one of the moons of Mars. You're a prisoner in the dungeons of the *Leather Goddess of Phobos*—a new interactive story from Infocom.

Interactive fiction is something we've been meaning to tell you about for several months now, since we first discovered it ourselves. If



COPYRIGHT © 1986 INFOCOM, INC.

an ordinary story is like a one-way trip through a haunted house, an interactive story is sort of like moving in for the

weekend and getting left to your own devices. We suspect that—unlike most of the other electronic marvels we've seen

in the last few years—it may prove to be something more than just an appealing new entertainment. There's no question, anyway, that interactive fiction is one of the Five Truly Important Reasons To Buy A Computer. (Don't ask us what the other four are; we aren't sure.)

Nobody publishes interactive fiction the way Infocom does. They didn't *quite* invent the form—it started with a game called *Adventure* in the late seventies. But the folks who founded Infocom, back when they were still students at MIT and just for kicks wrote a now-immortal game called *Zork*—certainly made interactive fiction what it is.

Incidentally, watch out for the *Leather Goddess*. She's got some awfully strange tricks up her—er—sleeve.

—Alan Rodgers



AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

LIFE IMITATES ART: Shortly after we'd accepted Lois McMaster Bujold's story "The Hole Truth" (page 68) a pothole of similar proportions opened up in Columbus, Ohio